

# ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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*M. R. RIDLEY*

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# I

## THE EARLY YEARS

This book is an attempt to give a picture of a very great man. It was part of his greatness that in some ways, though not in all ways, he was a very simple man; but the business of writing a short life of him is not simple at all. I want therefore to explain some things at the outset, and I have not put them in a preface, where perhaps they belong, since few people ever read prefaces, and it is important that anyone who is going to read this book should know both what there is in it and—even more important—what there is not in it, and also should have an idea why it is worth while getting some sort of picture of the man it is about.

In the first place, then, to write shortly about Abraham Lincoln is not easy, because a great deal is known about his life, and many people have written about him. And the many people do not at all agree with one another in what they think about him. There are several times in his life when we know exactly *what* he did, but can only guess *why* he did it; and people's guesses are quite different. Now if I was writing a long and elaborate biography I should try to give the facts, and the various interpretations of them, and leave readers to

make up their own minds. But there is not space for that, so that I have to give the picture of Lincoln as I see him, with my own guesses, and you must bear in mind all the time that they are only one person's guesses and no better than anyone else's.

In the second place, the most important four years of Lincoln's life were the last four, during which he was President of the United States. Those four years were the years of the Civil War in America. That war was caused by various difficulties, political and otherwise, which are not at all easy to follow, and which would take a great deal of space to explain; and the war itself, though extraordinarily interesting for the study of military history, and for many other reasons, does not need to be studied in detail if what one is interested in is Lincoln. The details were the concern of the various generals whom he appointed, and with whom he wisely interfered very little.

In the third place, Lincoln is important as being a very typical American. Anyone who understands Lincoln has gone a long way towards understanding America. And he is perhaps even more important as being a typical leader of a democracy. We believe in democracy, in 'government by the people for the people', as being the proper kind of government for free men. Now any kind of government, whether it is a dictatorship or the freest of free democracies, must have some leaders, and it is one of the most important things in the world that people who live under a democratic government should have some idea of the sort of leaders that they need.

The best leader of a democracy is a man who has learned that he can never lead from too far in front, and indeed sometimes has to lead, as it were, from behind. The dictator simply makes up his mind what he wants done, or thinks ought to be done, and gives his orders, which are carried out. He can 'impose' his wishes on his people. But the democratic leader



cannot do anything of the kind. His people have to make up their own minds what road they want to take, what gleam it is they want to follow. He can sometimes make it easier for them to make up their own minds, can sometimes help them to see clearly, when they see only dimly, what at the bottom of their hearts they really want. And it is one of the marks of the great democratic leader, as it was of Lincoln, that by some sort of instinct he sees into the minds of his nation, so that he knows, sometimes long before they know it themselves, what their 'corporate will' on a big issue is going to be, and can state it in simple terms, so that they feel it—and rightly feel it—to be their own. But even so he cannot actually make up their minds for them; the final decision is still with them. It is when they have made up their minds that his main job begins. He can see that they do not wander off the road, and can encourage them when the road seems harder than they expected when they started on it. Above all, he can keep up their faith that the road they are on, even when it seems hardest, is still the road they first chose, and the only road which, deep down in them, they know is worth travelling. And that is just what Lincoln, during his years as President, was doing, and what other great democratic leaders have done and will always do.

This book, then, is not a history of the American Civil War; still less is it a history of American politics from 1830 to 1865. It is a sketch of a person, of a man who started from the very humblest beginnings, and finished as the head of a great nation in the second great crisis of its history. Politics and war come in only so far as they were the things which this man had to handle. Further, it is a sketch; it is as honest as I can make it, but it does not pretend to be 'the only' or even 'the true' Lincoln. Just as an artist has to say, 'Well, I am not quite happy about the mouth', or 'If I had drawn him in profile instead of almost full face you would have seen better what a

fine Roman nose Smith had', so the writer of a short biography can only say, 'This is so-and-so as I see him'. But I hope that this will give you some sort of sketch from which you can go on to make your own pictures for yourselves.

Abraham Lincoln was born on Sunday, 12th February, 1809, in a log cabin some two miles from a place called Hodgenville, in the state of Kentucky. Though a Kentuckian by birthplace, he was a Virginian, from 'the Old Dominion', by descent. His grandfather, after whom he was named, had been a captain of Virginia militia, who in 1782 moved with his family to Kentucky, took out a claim for 2000 acres of land, and settled down to farm. The youngest of his three sons, Thomas, learned early what frontier life meant. When he was about eight he was working in the fields with his father and his two elder brothers when suddenly his father fell dead, shot by an Indian, and the Indian, as he came out to scalp him, was shot by one of the brothers. For twenty years after that Tom Lincoln was in various places in Kentucky, at first working for farmers for hire, later having a farm of his own, and turning himself into a good carpenter and cabinet-maker. He seems to have been an independent person, liking to go his own way, a sound workman, a tiger to fight when roused, which was not often, a silent man for the most part, but a good teller of stories when anyone could get him started. He had not much education, but he could read a little and could sign his name, which was more than many of his neighbours could do. In 1806 he married Nancy Hanks, also from Virginia, the adopted daughter of a Thomas Sparrow, and went to live in Elizabethtown, where he thrived at his trade of carpenter. But two years later, for some reason which does not appear, he and his wife and a baby daughter, Sarah, moved to a small farm near Hodgenville, and here Abraham was born.

His nine-year-old cousin, Dennis Hanks, who later made



some interesting and very sound comments on the boy as he grew up, started with one which was not so happy. He asked if he might hold the baby and was allowed to, but the baby did not approve and yelled. 'He'll never come to much,' said the disappointed Dennis.

When Abraham was three the family moved to a farm on Knob Creek, eight miles from Hodgenville, and stayed there till he was seven. As he and his sister grew old enough they helped with small jobs about the farm. The family fed on the corn (i.e. maize) and vegetables that they grew, on wild fruit, fish out of the streams, and the game that their father shot. The skins of the beasts were tanned and made into clothes. And here Abraham had his first schooling at the Knob Creek school, walking two miles each way on days when he could be spared from the farm. The days did not come very often, and the education did not amount to much. The school was what was known as a 'blab school', and there was hardly any 'teaching' as we understand it. The children sat and said their lessons, the alphabet or the multiplication table, over to themselves aloud till it was time for each in turn to say them to the teacher, and so there must have been a good deal of a babel, while some of them were saying 'A-B-C', and some of them 'Seven nines are sixty-three', and some others 'C-A-T, Cat, C-O-O-N, Coon', and so on. But at least it was better than nothing.

In 1816, Thomas Lincoln was appointed road-surveyor, but he did not hold the appointment long, since before the end of the year he made up his mind to leave Kentucky for Indiana, across the Ohio River. There seems to have been a love of change in his blood, and he hated to be tied down by a place or a job, even if he liked the place and was good at the job. But there were more solid reasons than this. For one thing, there was at the time a good deal of uncertainty about the title deeds by which various settlers in Kentucky held their land,

and many of them who had worked for some years, day in day out, to clear their bit of forest and make a living for themselves and their families, found themselves deprived of their land on some legal technicality. This had happened to the famous Daniel Boone, and if it had happened to him it might happen to anyone. In the second place, Kentucky was a slave state and Indiana was not. In a slave state, so long as the white man held his own land (or for that matter ran his own business) he was secure; but if his farm failed and he had to look for work from wealthier men who would employ him, then he became one of the 'poor whites', who found work very hard to get, since no employer wanted to pay wages when he could get the work done for no more outlay than the purchase of a slave. In the third place, reports were coming in that there was much rich farm land in Indiana, ready to be worked by anyone who would go there to work it.

So in the autumn of 1816 Thomas Lincoln built himself a 'flat-boat' (a sort of barge), traded his farm for twenty dollars in cash and ten barrels of whisky (not for his drinking but as a kind of money which anyone in those days was ready to accept), loaded his barge with some of his household furniture and the barrels, and set off down Knob Creek to the Ohio River. He crossed it to a place called Thompson's Ferry, left his whisky and furniture with a man called Posey, and struck off to select his land. He found what he wanted on the banks of a stream called Little Pigeon Creek, blazed the trees as the law demanded, and walked back to Knob Creek and his waiting family.

They loaded all that was left of the household goods on to two horses and set off on the hundred-mile trip to Indiana and their new home. When they came to Thompson's Ferry they hired a wagon from Posey, loaded the furniture and whisky on to it, and drove out sixteen miles to the new claim. Here they were, then, like many others of the new settlers,



with a little bit of land of their own which they had to clear from virgin forest and turn into farm land, the furniture they had brought with them, but no house to put it in, no farm animals, and ten barrels of whisky, or so much of that as they had left after paying Posey for the hire of the wagon. And winter was fast coming on, so the first thing clearly was some sort of shelter. There was no time for anything as permanent though rough as a log cabin, so they built what was known as a 'half-faced camp'. This was a kind of shed, with two of the trees on their land for the two main posts, and open all down the side that faced south. The three walls and the roof were roughly built with poles covered with small branches and dried grass and mud. In front of the open side they had their log fire. In this temporary home they lived all through that winter and the next summer. It did well enough in good weather, but if the rain was hard and the roof leaked, or the wind set in from the south and blew the smoke into it, it was even less comfortable than the four-walled log cabin in Kentucky which they had left. As soon as this half-faced camp was up, Thomas Lincoln began felling the timber for a proper log cabin, but as he was single-handed, and had many other things to do in clearing his land and getting it ready for farming, the new house was not ready till next autumn. In this new house the Lincoln family lived for the next thirteen years.

During the next year Abraham got on a little with his education. But as by this time he was more useful to his father, and was even allowed a small axe of his own to help in the building of the new house, and as the school was nine miles away, so that even half a day's schooling meant an eighteen-mile trudge for his sister and himself, there were not many days when he could go. His father, indeed, was no great believer in any education more than the little he had himself, and if it had not been for his mother Lincoln would probably never have been to this school at all. And even when after nine



miles he got there it was no more than the same kind of 'blab' school as he had gone to at Knob Creek.

In the autumn of 1817, when they had moved into their new house, there unexpectedly arrived the Sparrows from Hodgenville, with Dennis Hanks, and they lived in the half-faced camp till they could find land of their own, but before they had found their land both Mr. and Mrs. Sparrow died of an epidemic which attacked both men and cattle in the neighbourhood and was known as the 'milk sick', and not long after them Abraham's own mother caught it and died. Thomas Lincoln and Dennis sawed a log into planks for her coffin and Abraham cut dowel pins to peg them together. Mrs. Lincoln was buried in a little clearing near by in the forest, and Thomas Lincoln was left with his own two children and Dennis Hanks.

A year later their father left the children alone for some weeks, not telling them why he was going, but promising to come back soon. He went to Elizabethtown, Kentucky, knowing what he wanted, and in his usual way going very straight to the point. Before he married Nancy Hanks, he had wanted to marry Sarah Bush, but she had refused him and married a man called Johnston. He had died two or three years before. Thomas Lincoln went to her, and said that they had known one another a long time, she had lost her husband and he his wife; would she marry him? If she would, he wanted it to be at once because he had no time to lose. She objected that she had debts. He paid them and they were married on the 2nd of December, 1819. A few days later the children welcomed with surprise and delight, and possibly a little apprehension, their returned father and his new wife and her three children, John, Sarah, and Matilda Johnston. They arrived in style in a four-horse wagon with a great deal of furniture, much better than the Lincoln family had hitherto been used to.

To his new mother Abraham Lincoln owed a great deal. She was always entirely kindly, she believed in education, and even in opposition to his father insisted that he should have all that he could lay hands on, and above all she understood him. His queer silences never worried her. If he suddenly laughed at something he thought funny when nobody else had seen the joke, she did not think it odd. She knew that everyone has to grow up in his own way.

The life at Little Pigeon Creek was often hard, but it was always healthy. There was almost always enough to eat, and always more than enough work to do. And Abraham Lincoln, as he grew up from the small boy to the big boy, was toughened and hardened. He early became a first-rate woodsman, and expert with the axe. One of his neighbours said that if you heard him felling trees you would think by the way the trees came down that there were three men felling them. All kinds of stories went round about his strength, which was quite beyond his age. One of the stories shows not only his strength, but the kind of person he was. He was coming home one night in winter with some other boys when they found a man lying beside the road, dead drunk. They tried to wake him, but could not. The others went home and left Abraham with his problem. He took him up, slung him over his shoulders, took him back to Dennis Hanks's cabin, lit a fire and left him there to sleep it off. A grown man is not only a heavy but a very awkward bundle for a boy of fourteen.

By this time he was known all round the neighbourhood as the best wrestler of anywhere near his age, and also the best runner. By the time he was eighteen this ridiculously tall boy, who looked, as his own father said, as though he was all joints, could hold an axe out by the helve at the full length of his arm level with his shoulder. There was nothing in the ordinary life of the farm that he could not do, and he had learned from his father a good deal of carpentry. When he was sixteen he used



to earn 1s. 6d. a day by 'butchering' for the neighbouring farmers, that is, killing the cattle, skinning them, and then cutting them up.

The comments of the people who employed him were interesting: he was a good worker and an honest worker, and if he was paid for a job the job would be done; but he was not particularly fond of the work for its own sake. One of his employers complained that he was always reading and thinking, and said that one day Abraham had told him that his father had taught him to work but he had never taught him to love it. The truth was that all this time he worked because he had to, but what he wanted was to be getting educated. And this he managed to do by borrowing books from anyone who would lend them, sometimes working for two or three days for the right to borrow them, and taking time to read them when he ought to have been sleeping. In all his life he had only about four months of actual schooling. Everything else he did for himself. And it was natural that in his early days he should say, 'My best friend is the man who'll git me a book I ain't read.'

This kind of passion for reading was not common among his friends, and it was natural that Dennis Hanks should make a remark about him that was true of him all his life, and not only in these early days. He said that there was 'suthin' peculiarsome' about Abraham. He got hold of *Æsop's Fables* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*. I think there is something peculiarly interesting about that trio. Abraham Lincoln all his life was a great teller of stories, but, at any rate in his later life, not just for the sake of telling a funny story. The story was always illustrating something that he was thinking about, often some quite big problem of state policy. And the kind of wisdom that there is in *Æsop's Fables* would even in his boyhood appeal to him.

*The Pilgrim's Progress* is the story of a very ordinary man,

who got to the end of a long and difficult journey, often making blunders, usually lonely, and sometimes near despair, with nothing much to carry him through except a determination, which nothing could shake, that the goal he was trying to reach was the only journey's end worth striving for.

*Robinson Crusoe*, besides being a first-rate story, is a study of how to 'make do' with tools much less perfect than one would like for the job in hand. And that was something that Lincoln was doing all his life, from his days as the poor farmer's son, getting a difficult education out of fewer books than he liked, till the very end of his life when as the President of the United States he was having to try to win a war with a series of generals many of whom were quite incompetent for their jobs.

A little later he managed to borrow a *Life of George Washington* with a cumbrous sub-title which said that it was full of 'curious anecdotes, equally honourable to himself and exemplary to his young countrymen'. This gave him, I suppose, his first feeling of the history of his own country, and of all that George Washington had stood for, a man dead honest, with a passion for freedom, and with inflexible courage when things were going badly.

And while we are looking at the way in which Lincoln hunted for his education, there is something about his life during these years which is perhaps worth remembering.

Lincoln was always, I think, a very lonely person. This may sound an odd thing to say about somebody who was a famous story-teller, and could be the life and soul of any group of people in which he found himself. He could meet all kinds of different people on their own ground, and be intensely interested in them. He could take advice from anyone, and use it. But in all the really great moments of his life he seemed to draw away from all the world outside him and make up his mind in solitude. And a good part of his boyhood was a solitary life, and from it he learned how to be alone without feeling at a



loss. If you are felling trees all day in a clearing in the forest by yourself, with no one to talk to and nothing there but the trees and the animals and the birds, you feel cut off from the ordinary world of people, and if you are made the right way you do not resent it, or feel lost, but you learn from it. And even in his quite early boyhood Lincoln was liable to odd fits when he seemed to have gone off into a world of his own and be quite unconscious of anything that was happening around him. And then he would come back with a jump and tell his stories and enter into all that was going on.

When he was about sixteen Lincoln started a new trade. He had been working on a farm at the mouth of one of the small rivers which ran into the Ohio, and in such spare time as he had from his farm work he worked a ferry-boat across the Ohio River. He made a little money by this, but he got out of it something far more valuable than a little extra pocket-money, and that was the experience of meeting and talking with all kinds of people who wanted to be ferried across, educated and uneducated, decent citizens and criminals. Later he set up as a ferry-man on his own, taking passengers from the Indiana shore out to steamboats in the river. He built his own boat and did quite well out of his ferrying.

This venture of his own did more than bring in money; it gave him his first acquaintance with the law that was so important to his later life. He was arrested, on a charge laid against him by two brothers, who worked a ferry right across the river, and who said that he had operated a ferry from Indiana to Kentucky against the law. He was able to prove that he had never ferried anybody from one shore to another but had merely taken passengers from the Indiana shore to the steamboats. The charge was therefore dismissed. But as a result Lincoln had a long conversation with the magistrate before whom he appeared. The magistrate told him that it was a great advantage to any man to know just what the law says

about any business he is engaged in. This interested Lincoln, and often after that, whenever this magistrate was trying a case, Lincoln used to go across the river and listen to the way in which a case was conducted. He heard the charges made, and the way in which witnesses gave their evidence, and the way in which the magistrate gave his verdict. And he began to realize how much the law means, and began also to be interested in the kind of machinery by which it works.

At the age of nineteen Lincoln had his first real glimpse of the outside world. A farmer in the Pigeon Creek district, a man called Gentry, thought, very wisely, that if he could send his farm produce, his bacon and meal, down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans he could make a profitable exchange for the products of the South, particularly cotton and tobacco. He was going to send his son in charge of the boat and the goods, but he wanted to find someone whom he could trust to send as a companion with his son, and this someone needed to be, besides trustworthy, a tough man of his hands who could give rather better than he got if anyone tried to rob the boat on her way. And he pitched on Lincoln. It was as well that he did. Lincoln built the necessary flat-boat, she was loaded up, and the two young men set off on their long trip down the two great rivers.

All went well till they got to a place called Baton Rouge in the sugar-plantation country. Here they tied up, and woke up in the middle of the night to find seven negroes looting the boat. Lincoln, annoyed at being woken in the middle of the night, and, as always, ready for a fight in a good cause, laid into them with a club, chased them off the boat into the woods, came back with a gash over his eye, and helped cast off the boat and steer her to a less adventurous mooring-place. After this they had no more adventures, and crew and cargo arrived safely in New Orleans.



Here the nineteen-year-old young man from the woods of Kentucky and Indiana had his first sight of a city, and there was hardly a city in the United States at that time which could have offered him such a kaleidoscope. New Orleans had been first Spanish and then French. It became American in 1803, at the time of the 'Louisiana purchase', by which the whole territory or province of Louisiana,<sup>1</sup> ceded by Spain to France in 1800, was bought from France by the United States.

New Orleans, therefore, was a cosmopolitan city, with resident citizens of various nationalities; and as it was also a great port there were always in it sailors from countries all over the world. As an eye-opener for Lincoln it could not have been improved on. Here, too, for the first time he saw slavery in action. As a child he had no doubt seen slaves in Kentucky; but he had not seen them in Indiana, and he had never seen the machinery of slavery, the buying and selling of the slaves. The auctioning of a mulatto girl, whom the prospective buyers were examining as they would a prize cow, provoked from Lincoln (we are told) the comment 'If ever I get a chance of hitting this thing, I'll hit it hard.'

At New Orleans Gentry and Lincoln exchanged their cargo for tobacco, sugar, and cotton, sold the flat-boat for what little it would fetch (these craft could not be navigated back against the stream), and came home by river steamer.

Once home again Lincoln took up the old round of work on the farm, and got on as best he could with his education. In particular he began his first reading of law. He borrowed from the local constable a copy of *The Revised Laws of Indiana*, which, besides the State laws, included the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. It

<sup>1</sup> The 'Louisiana' of 1803 was something very different from the Louisiana of today. It included, as well as the present state of Louisiana, a great belt of land north and north-west from what is now Louisiana in the south to the land which is now the Dakotas and Montana on the Canadian border.

must have been pretty heavy going, since laws have to go into great detail, and the style of those who draft them is a good deal less attractive than the styles of Æsop or Bunyan or Defoe. But Lincoln had a patient mind and a love of getting down to brass tacks, to what a historian would call 'original documents'. And if he made up his mind that he was going to find out just how he, Lincoln, was governed both as a citizen of the state of Indiana and as a citizen of the United States of America, no amount of trouble or dryness of style was going to prevent him finding out.

In the autumn of 1829 Thomas Lincoln thought that fourteen years was long enough to have stayed in one place. He heard that there was better farming country over in Illinois, and anyway his own farm was not paying well, giving them enough to live on but not much over. So they spent the winter making a wagon for the move, buying oxen to pull it, and selling the Little Pigeon Creek farm. In February of the next year they moved, just after Abraham had come of age. Thinking that he might make a trifle on the way, he bought a small stock of pins and buttons and oddments ('notions') to sell to farmers' wives as they went along; and he sold them for double what they cost him.

They settled first in Macon County, near Decatur, where Lincoln worked for a neighbouring farmer, as well as helping his father, and when he wanted a little extra money made it by 'rail-splitting'. This is the job of splitting logs lengthways to make into cross-bars, the 'rails' for fences; and for some reason or other of all his early activities it was the one that people remembered and attached to his name when he became a distinguished man. No doubt he split an excellent rail, but he did many other things with his hands equally well, and many of them much more continuously than rail-splitting. Anyhow, there it was; this particular craft caught the imagination of the people as the thing that their President had made



money by in his youth. As well as earning money, he made his first public speech.

In 1831, after a desperately hard winter of cold and blizzards, during which some of the settlers died of exposure and starvation, and most of them were near the end of their tether, the Lincoln family moved a hundred miles south, to Coles County near the town of Charleston, and from here—after winning a wrestling match against the champion of the neighbouring county—Lincoln started on his second trip to New Orleans. He was hired by a man called Offut, at twelve dollars a month (half as much again as he had got on his first trip), to build a flat-boat and take a cargo with two companions down the Mississippi.

While they were in camp building the boat there happened the first recorded episode which connects Lincoln with hats. Lincoln's hats were as much a part of the Lincoln tradition as, say, Sir Winston Churchill's cigar was of his. They followed one another in long and disreputable series, they were the despair of his wife, and even when they were top hats they looked as though he had bought them third-hand and kept them in the dustbin. Here in camp there appeared a juggler, and when he wanted to do a trick with eggs he asked for someone to lend him a hat. No one was very keen, in case the trick was not a success and the eggs broke. In the end Lincoln offered his, saying that he would have offered it before, since the eggs certainly could do the hat no harm, but he had not thought the hat good enough for the eggs.

In April the boat was finished and they started. This time there were no adventures with robbers, but they nearly lost the whole outfit at New Salem, on the Sangamon River, quite soon after they started, when the boat stuck on a mill-dam and began to fill, tipping more and more as the barrels slid down to the water-logged end. Lincoln managed to unload all the barrels, bored a hole to let out the water, righted the boat,

got her over the dam, and reloaded. They reached New Orleans safely and traded their goods. Lincoln stayed there a month and then worked his passage home as fireman on a river steamer. He stayed a while with his family, and then started off to make his own way in the world, off on the road that led him to the White House.

## 2

### ODD JOBS AND STATE POLITICS

What kind of a man was this Abraham Lincoln when, at the age of twenty-one, now his own master, he set out to make his own way in the world? He was very tall—six foot four—very thin, and very loose jointed, with immensely long arms, and very ungainly in movement. But this loose frame, 'all joints', had been toughened by years of hard work with the axe and in the fields till it was like steel and whipcord. He was phenomenally strong, and could lift as much as two ordinary men. He was also a champion wrestler, and this means that he was much better co-ordinated than his shambling movements led one to expect, since good wrestling is a matter not only of mere strength but of the adroit application of strength. On the top of this gangling frame was set a remarkable head, with a great forehead over steady eyes, a mouth at once sensitive and firm, cheekbones and a jaw looking as though they had been cut out of granite. The face, even then, was deeply lined. No one ever called Lincoln handsome, but no one who had an eye for character forgot his face. It was the face of a man slow to be moved, but, when moved, inflexible in determination; tender, and dour, and humorous; there was a lot of the Low-



land Scot in this great American. He had little education to fit him for making a career, and what there was had been mostly wrung with difficulty and sleeplessness from such books as he could borrow; but he had plenty of the wisdom that comes to a man who knows how to use the experience gained from meeting with all kinds of people. He was a great teller of stories. No record suggests that he had any very clear ambitions. He was interested in the law, but he was rather like his father; he was prepared to make a decent living at any job that offered itself, and if one failed then he would take another. He would do the best that he could with that, and then if anything else offered itself, and he thought he could do it creditably, then he would take the new one.

His first job was no more exciting than that of keeping a store at New Salem for Offut (the man who had hired him for his second trip to New Orleans). He made his position secure with at any rate part of the community quite early, but not by store-keeping. Offut backed him to defeat a local champion, a certain Jack Armstrong, of the 'Clary's Grove Boys', at wrestling. In the middle of a bout Armstrong, getting cross because he could not get past Lincoln's long arms and get a firm grip, lost his temper and fouled by stamping on Lincoln's foot. This roused the equable Lincoln, who picked Armstrong up by the neck, shook him and threw him flat. Armstrong's supporters started to attack Lincoln, when the defeated champion got up from the ground, told them not to be silly, that Lincoln had won fair and was 'the best fellow that ever broke into this settlement'.

After that Lincoln's position was secure. He didn't drink, he didn't gamble, but he was 'one of the boys', and he was much in request as umpire at any races or matches. And this challenge from Armstrong's backer was perhaps at the root of another story of his early days at New Salem, which may not be true but is worth giving as showing the kind of reputation



he had in the neighbourhood. He was challenged to something like the old Greek 'pentathlon'—a five-event athletic contest—though this was strictly a 'tri-athlon', with only three events. First he was to run a race against one man; then he was to wrestle with another; then he was to fight (with fists) with a third. He won the foot-race; he threw the second man over his head so that he nearly broke his neck. Then he said, getting rather cross, and feeling that he was being made a joke of, 'Bring on your third champion. I can do him up in three shakes of a sheep's tail, and whip the whole pack of you if you give me ten minutes between fights.' But by this time the group of his opponents thought that so redoubtable a person had better be one of themselves than against them, and they 'took him into their crowd'.

In the intervals of selling goods in the store he got on with his education, in particular reading and studying *Kirkham's English Grammar*. And he joined the literary and debating society of New Salem, speaking when he thought he knew something about the subject and being quiet when he did not. He knew he was not a polished speaker, and apologized for his way of putting his arguments, but people began to realize that there was more here than a store-clerk and a wrestler; his ideas might sometimes be awkwardly put, but it was clear that he had thought them out for himself, not picked them up second-hand, and that he was trying his hardest to say what he meant.

In 1832 he was out of a job again, since the store failed. Offut was a rash speculator, a poor man of business, and a hard drinker who drank much of his own whisky instead of selling it and making a profit. And Lincoln, though as honest as the day, had not the manner of a good salesman. However, at this rather low ebb of his fortunes, he was encouraged by some of his friends to run for election as the representative of Sangamon County in the legislature of Illinois. He made a speech, which

he had printed for circulation, in which he said very simply what he had to say on three things: the improving of the Sangamon River for navigation, so as to help the trade of the people on its banks, a law to stop the lending of money at high rates of interest, and the need for everyone to have a moderate education.

This was in March, but before he could start on any regular electioneering he was interrupted by the only bit of soldiering of his life. The Indians were out, under a famous old chief called Black Hawk. Regular soldiers were sent on orders from Washington, and the State government of Illinois called for volunteers to act with them. Lincoln volunteered, and was elected captain of his company. He made his old opponent, Armstrong, his sergeant. He had a rough crowd under him, with rather less than no sense of discipline. The first time he gave an order the reply he got was, 'Go to Hell'. But he managed to keep them in some sort of control just by being himself, and also partly because they knew that, while he was going to insist on some sort of obedience as the only way of getting on with the job, he would stand up for them against outsiders, as he did over rations, telling the regular officers that if his men did not get the same rations as the regular soldiers there would be trouble. He pointed out, quite reasonably, that they were State volunteers, and not under the rules of the War Department in Washington. Lincoln's company was never under fire, and the most strenuous episode of the campaign for him was getting beaten, for the first and only time in his life, in a wrestling match.

When he got home, after the campaign was over, he went on with his interrupted electioneering. One of his speeches, as recalled by a friend, must be one of the shortest electioneering addresses on record. 'Gentlemen and fellow-citizens: I presume you all know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for



the legislature. My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance. I am in favour of a national bank. I am in favour of the internal-improvements system, and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same.'

When the election came, he lost, being only seventh out of twelve candidates, though among his fellow-townsmen in New Salem, of whom 300 voted, there were only 23 who did not vote for him.

After this he turned again to store-keeping, this time on his own, not as someone else's clerk, and with the son of a Presbyterian minister as his partner. This venture was no more successful. The partner gambled and drank; Lincoln himself read law; and the customers went elsewhere. The best thing that came out of it was that one day, as a kindness to a casual passer-by, Lincoln bought a barrel; he did not want the barrel, but when he came to empty out the rubbish he found at the bottom of it a copy of one of the most famous of law books, *Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England*. His notions of a career had already been half turned towards the law by the conversation of a lawyer friend, and this book may have completed the turn.

Meantime, however, he had to live. He split rails again, and worked for the neighbouring farmers. He was made postmaster. This was not a particularly paying job, but it was useful to him, since all newspapers were distributed through the Post Office and so he could get all the newspaper reading he wanted for nothing. Then he was offered the post of assistant surveyor. He did not know the first thing about surveying, but he got a book on the subject, and by means of sitting up all night with his friend the schoolmaster, and wearing himself out till his friends thought he would fall seriously ill, he made himself an efficient surveyor. For this work he was

paid three dollars a day, when his work was needed, but that was not all the year round, and this was probably the hardest period of his life. He was making very little money, and what with the money he had borrowed to buy the store and the goods for it, he was a thousand dollars in debt. Once his horse, with its saddle and bridle, and his surveying instruments, were taken to settle a debt; and as he could not earn even his three dollars a day without them, he must have been pretty near despair. But a friend went to the auction, bought in the horse and the whole outfit, and made Lincoln a present of them.

In 1834 he stood again for the legislature and this time was elected, second on the list for Sangamon County and almost first. He spent the year in the State capital, which was then at Vandalia, and introduced various small bills in the legislature. When he came back to New Salem in the spring of 1835 he became engaged to Ann Rutledge, the daughter of a leading store-keeper, who had been the president of the literary society, and in whose house Lincoln had lived for a time two years before. In the autumn of that same year an epidemic of fever swept over the district and she died. This, so far as we know, was the one time in his life that Lincoln was really in love. Ann Rutledge was by all accounts a lovely person both in face and character, and for some months after her death Lincoln was in a state of melancholy that made his friends fear at times that he was going off his head. And even when he recovered, those who knew him best agreed in saying that he was never quite the same man again.

In 1836 he was re-elected to the legislature, and during this session proposals came up for moving the State capital from Vandalia to some other town. There was, of course, very hot competition among the various districts, since the town which was State capital was bound to attract more visitors, and so bring more business into the town and more money into the



pockets of its citizens. Lincoln now had his first experience of political tactics. He was determined that, if it could be done, Springfield, the chief town of his own county, Sangamon County, should be the State capital, and to secure this he had to go to work collecting the votes of all the members of the legislature who either did not particularly care where the capital was, or who, because they knew that their own pet town had very small chance of selection, were prepared to give their votes to anyone else who would in return support some project of their own. Lincoln was indefatigable, and it was mainly due to him that in the end Springfield was selected. He talked to everyone who was likely to be useful, persuading them of the advantages of Springfield, or offering them the support of his own circle on some other issue if they would vote the way he wanted on his issue. This sort of political manoeuvring is a weary and often a sordid business, but it is a thing that sometimes has to be done, and Lincoln, from his wide experience of men, was peculiarly fitted to do it. There were few people as good as he at sizing up a man's quality, and then using just the right methods for steering him down the right road while he thought he was going down it of his own accord.

# 3

## LAWYER AND CONGRESSMAN

The eighteen years of Lincoln's life from 1836, when he was re-elected to the Illinois legislature, down to 1854, when a great issue brought him into the arena of national politics, are a period which it is very difficult to make interesting, but a period also which is very important. People sometimes talk about Lincoln, and legends wander round about him, as though he had never been anything but an uncultivated backwoodsman, rail-splitter, farmer's help, and so on, who by some curious fluke jumped straight from that to being President of the United States. Nothing could be wider of the mark. For all of these eighteen years he was practising as a lawyer, and making his living by his legal work. His experience as a lawyer is important, because, as we shall see later, Lincoln's judgement on certain great problems was primarily a lawyer's judgement.

For a considerable part of those eighteen years he was engaged in politics, first in the State legislature and then as one of the representatives of his State in the House of Representatives at Washington; i.e. he was something very roughly corresponding to a Member of Parliament in this country.



Those years of political life are important because they taught him a great deal about the actual machinery of politics, the way in which votes must be worked for and held, the way in which men must be handled, and different interests played off against one another. By 1854 Lincoln was, so far as his experience of the world was concerned, an entirely different man from what he had been when he first left his father's house to make his own way. He had moved in the great world of affairs, and there was very little that he did not know about the game of politics.

A year after Ann Rutledge's death Lincoln had a rather silly love affair with a Miss Owens which lasted off and on till the spring of 1838. It is doubtful whether he ever cared very much about her, but they might have drifted into marriage if she had been willing to marry him. She found him, however, lacking in the ordinary social graces, and finally turned him down. He then admitted that he was very much more mortified by her refusal than he had expected to be. Four years later he married; it would perhaps be more accurate to say that he was at last, and after considerable difficulties, dragged to the altar by a very determined young lady.

In 1840 Mary Todd, from Lexington, Kentucky, came to stay with friends in Springfield. She was then twenty-two. She was short, pretty in a quite ordinary way, with a quick tongue and a quick temper, full of vitality, and not less full of ambition. She made it clear that she had no intention of marrying simply to have a happy home life, nor had she any intention of marrying for money; she was going to marry, if she could, for a distinguished position. And she had the wits to see that Lincoln had in him the stuff that might in the end bring both him and her to fame. Lincoln was clearly attracted by her and after a time they became engaged. On thinking it over he felt that he was not sufficiently in love with her to go on with the engagement, and he wrote a letter telling her so. A friend

suggested to him that this was no way to go to work, and that he ought to go to see her and tell her his feelings honestly and face to face. This, as it turned out, was, if he was determined to break the engagement, a fatal thing to do, because in the interview she completely broke down, and Lincoln's kindly heart was so touched that he could not go through with it and the engagement was patched up.

They were to be married on New Year's Day, 1841. All the preparations were made and the bride was ready. But there was no bridegroom. He, at the moment when he ought to have been getting married, was in his place in the Legislature. It is no good pretending that this was anything but highly discreditable to Lincoln. He was probably right in thinking that he ought not to marry Miss Todd. I think he felt at the bottom of his heart that after the death of Ann Rutledge he had, at any rate for the present, very little to offer anybody else. But he ought to have made this clear to Mary Todd and firmly broken the engagement, instead of trying to break it, drifting back into it, and then insulting his bride by simply not turning up for the wedding. He knew quite well that he had behaved badly, and I suppose that this accounts for the fact that eighteen months later, after a lady who was a friend of his and of Mary Todd's brought about a meeting and told them to be friends again, he finally yielded. Mary Todd was clear that if the wedding was to come off at all it had better come off with very little delay, and on the 11th of November, 1842, they were married.

Lincoln's anticipations of married life were not very cheerful, and may be judged from the fact that one of his friends said that on the morning of his wedding he 'looked as though he was going to slaughter', and that a boy in the house where he was lodging, seeing him all dressed up, asked where he was going, and Lincoln very gloomily said, 'To hell, I suppose.' A few days after his wedding he was less depressed but more



surprised, since he writes to a friend a letter in which he discussed two law cases and then went on: 'Nothing new here except my marriage, which, to me, is a matter of profound wonder.'

The marriage, though it began so inauspiciously, did not turn out as badly as might have been feared. Mrs. Lincoln's temper did not improve with time, and many of her husband's ways exasperated her so that he frequently got the rough side of her tongue; but she knew that she had married a great man, and each at least respected the other. Further, in the pursuit of her ambitions she showed a good deal of plain common sense and tactical ability. Some years after their marriage Lincoln was offered the Governorship of the Oregon Territory; he refused it. He was then quite unknown, and the offer was, on a short view, highly attractive. But acceptance would in fact have put him firmly on the shelf away out in Oregon and quite out of reach of the Presidency, and there seems no doubt that his refusal was due to Mrs. Lincoln.

There were four children of the marriage, all sons, of whom one died in infancy and another in the first year of the war. Thomas ('Tad'), to whom Lincoln was particularly devoted, was a boy in Washington during the war, and Robert, the eldest, was at Harvard. Both of these two lived on into mature life, and Robert was later ambassador to Great Britain.

In 1837, when Springfield became the State capital, he went into partnership there with J. T. Stewart, and as his partner was at the time running for Congress, almost all the legal work of the partners fell to him. In 1841 he left Stewart and went into partnership with one of the best lawyers in the State, a man called S. T. Logan, from whom in the course of four years he learned a great deal of law. But the two men did not get on very well. They had little in common except ability; Logan was an exact, precise, and tidy man, and Lincoln was all his life incorrigibly untidy. He could usually find the paper he

wanted among the muddle of papers that he used to carry around in his stove-pipe hat, in the same way that he could always find the appropriate story from the lumber-room of assorted stories that he carried in his head; but the general impression which he produced was one of slovenliness. In 1845 he went into partnership with a much younger man, William Herndon. The partnership lasted for the rest of his legal career, and the friendship between the two lasted until the end of his life.

In 1846 he was elected Congressman for Illinois and spent the years 1847 and 1848 in Washington learning the ins and outs of federal politics, as he had already learned those of state politics. He made a few speeches, and on one or two of the issues, particularly the Mexican War, he took, because he was sure it was right, a line which was not at all popular with those at home who had elected him, and was not at all likely to secure his re-election. But on the whole he found being a Congressman disappointing; he made no particular mark, and when his two years were over he came back quite happily to Springfield to go on with his legal career, and though he remained interested in domestic politics he took very little practical part in them for the next six years. But he watched the march of events as they drew nearer and nearer to a crisis, and made up his mind about them, so that in 1854, when he felt that the time had come for him to speak out on a great national issue, he knew what he wanted to say.



# 4

## THE GATHERING STORM

To understand what this issue was, and to understand many of the problems with which Lincoln had to deal from then onwards, it is necessary to go back some way in American history, and indeed to go back to the very beginning of what can be called American history as distinct from the history of the American continent.

When the War of Independence against England broke out in 1775 there were thirteen English colonies in America, and on the 4th of July, 1776, they drew up the famous Declaration of Independence, in which they stated that they were, 'and of right ought to be, free and independent States'. There is a great deal more in the Declaration of Independence which is worth reading, but that particular phrase is of very great importance, and if one does not pay attention to it, one is likely to misunderstand a great deal of American history from then till now. That phrase meant exactly what it said. The colonies were not declaring that they considered themselves part of a country which was in future to be free and independent of England. They were declaring that they were thirteen separate, free and independent States, independent not only of

the mother country but also of one another, however much for purposes of carrying on the war they had to combine in a common effort.

The war dragged on for seven years and was ended by a treaty the terms of which were not ungenerous. England gave over to the States the whole of the country westwards from their own territory to the Mississippi and north right up to the Canadian border, with the exception of Florida, which was handed over to Spain.

In the years which immediately followed the signing of the peace treaty it became more and more clear that the 'Articles of Confederation', which had been adopted towards the end of the war, were very unsatisfactory. Quarrels of all kinds were breaking out between the various States, and the absence of any kind of central government was leading to disorders which might easily develop into chaos. There was a growing feeling that some more satisfactory, and more clearly expressed, kind of agreement must be come to between the various States, if any of them were to be able to develop as they wished.

It should be noticed that the loose confederation did score one real success in a thing called the North-West Ordinance, which was passed in 1787. This was the result of considering what the States were to do with the new country which had become theirs under the treaty. It provided machinery whereby various portions of this undeveloped country, as they became more settled, and more and more people moved westwards into them, could develop into full States. A district was at first to be a territory, with a governor and judges. When its population of men over twenty years of age reached 5000, it was to have a kind of parliament, and last, when its population rose to 60,000, it was to become a full State. This covered the whole of the region north of the Ohio River, and it was expected that it would provide all the organization of from



three to five new States. And in these States slavery was to be illegal.

In May, 1787, in Philadelphia, fifty-five delegates, representing all the States except Rhode Island, met to work out a new and more satisfactory constitution. It was clear from the beginning that there were two main parties, the large States and the small States—that at least is how they are often described, but it would be more accurate to say the States which had, or expected to have, a large population and those which did not. The large States, not unnaturally, thought that representation, that is to say, the number of votes by which a State could influence any measure which affected all States, should be on a basis of population. The smaller States, equally naturally, took the line that one State was as good as another, and were afraid of being swamped except on a principle of something like 'one State, one vote'. There were frequent moments at which it looked as though the whole convention was going to break down. But after a great deal of negotiation a compromise was arrived at. And this compromise is still in force.

In the new parliament—in American language, 'Congress'—there were to be two Houses. In the House of Representatives there were to be a number of representatives from each State, but the precise number was to be in proportion to the population of the State. Each representative was to hold office for two years. There was also to be a Senate, in which each State, whatever its population, was to be represented by two senators. The senators were to hold office for six years. There was to be a President, holding office for four years, and elected by popular vote; (the actual machinery of election is somewhat complicated and does not at the moment concern us). There was also to be a Supreme Court of judges who were to be appointed by the President with the consent of the Senate. Very great pains were taken that no branch of the government could make itself completely independent of any

other branch. This is ordinarily known as the method of 'checks and balances' of which one hears a good deal in any discussion of the American Constitution. For example, Congress (that is to say, the House of Representatives, and the Senate) could formulate and pass a bill; if the President did not approve he could veto it; it could then be passed only by a two-thirds majority. Again, the composition of the Supreme Court was in the hands of the President with a certain amount of control by the Senate, but, once appointed, its power was great, and, in its own sphere, it could override those by whom it was appointed. In process of time, as the Constitution developed from a scheme on paper into full working order, it came to be accepted—whether or not the framers of the Constitution so intended it—that it was within the power of the Supreme Court to declare unconstitutional any bill, even if passed by Congress and approved by the President, if they considered that any of its provisions were not consistent with the Constitution. The only thing that could then be done about such a proposition was to amend the Constitution, and this—as has been found later, notably over the establishment and subsequent repeal of prohibition—is a difficult and complicated procedure, since any amendment of the Constitution requires, if it is to be carried, three-quarters of the States to vote for it, voting by States with one vote each.

The central government, what is called the 'Federal Government', was given the necessary wide powers which would enable it to act effectually; for example, it could coin money, since money was going to be the medium of exchange between the various States composing the Union. It could fix weights and measures, since things would clearly become impossible from the point of view of carrying on business if different States had different weights and measures. It could establish post offices and make main roads, both of which were necessary for free communication between States. It was given power to



raise a national army and navy (and incidentally the President was to be the Commander-in-Chief). It was to control relations with foreign governments. It was to function in a place geographically more or less central and not belonging to any one State, a little district known as the District of Columbia which is a bit of land, something like ten miles square, surrounding the city of Washington.

The central government was therefore strong within limits. But, and the but is a very big but, those limits were comparatively narrow. The States retained in many things their own independent government. Down to this day most of the things which affect the ordinary life of the individual citizen are under the control of his State government and not of the Federal Government. Most police work is a State matter; education is entirely a State matter; taxation is mainly, though not wholly, controlled by the State.<sup>1</sup>

It may seem odd that a number of States, after a critical war, and when they were just setting out to create a whole great new country, should seem so insistent on their independence and so little ready to put themselves under the complete control of a central government. It seems curious to us only because we are so apt to think of the United States of America, whether away back in their history or today, in quite the wrong way. I think we often have a picture of them as though they were something like so many English counties. Nobody can begin to get a proper picture of America unless he realizes at least two things. One is the enormous size of the country, and therefore the wide differences between different sections in such things as climate and the kind of crops that the soil will grow; and the second is the very wide differences in types of population, differences which to a large extent go right away

<sup>1</sup> To take a very small example, the amount of tax you pay on your car, the conditions under which you can get a driving licence, and the speed limits that you have to observe on the road, differ quite widely from State to State, and are often a cause of confusion to the unhappy visitor.

back to the time when the first colonies were founded. The thirteen original States were spread out in a long ribbon right along the Atlantic seaboard from what is now Maine, but was then part of Massachusetts, down to South Carolina. The distance by the one first-class road then existing from Wiscasset, in Maine, to Savannah, South Carolina, was about 1300 miles, about four times the distance from London to Edinburgh, or about double the crow-flight distance from Land's End to John o' Groats.

The thirteen States fell into three groups. First, in the north, there were the four States, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut (Vermont and Maine did not yet exist as States), which formed the compact block which was known as New England. The name was accurately descriptive. The very great majority of the inhabitants were of English Puritan descent. They were largely occupied with shipbuilding and overseas trading and fishing, though inland there was a good deal of farming, and townships of reasonable size had sprung up all over the district in which a certain amount of manufacture was carried on.

There was then a middle block of States, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. New York had originally been a Dutch foundation, and it still contained a number of Netherlanders, and some Germans, though the majority of the population by now was English. Pennsylvania and Delaware had large numbers of Germans and Scotch-Irish. New York State was partly mercantile and partly farming, the other four States mainly farming. Finally come the four southern States, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. In these there was very little of the mixture of population which was characteristic of the middle section. The inhabitants were either British by descent or negro slaves. There was hardly a city in the whole great area—even Charleston had a population of only 15,000. Almost everybody lived



in the country, whether they were wealthy landowners, owning many slaves and running their large tobacco plantations, or small farmers.

There was also a fourth division of this belt of country which one needs to bear in mind, and that is the 'frontier region'. It is worth noticing straight away that in the works of most American writers 'frontier' is apt to mean something quite different from what we understand by it. To us a frontier means a permanent line, which can be drawn on a map, and which divides one country from another. In American history a frontier was not a line but a region, and was a region which was perpetually moving. The frontier to an American meant a belt of country running north and south which marked the farthest advance westwards of anything one could call settlement and civilization, and as successive waves of pioneers pushed their way westwards the region of the frontier moved. This fourth section had strongly marked characteristics of its own, but there were no differences inside itself which could be at all marked by prolonging the boundaries of the States westwards. It was a belt occupied by pioneers, hunters and settlers, adventurous and independent people who felt that they owed no particular loyalty to any established government, whether State or Federal.

The climate in the various sections varied, and varies, as much as the population. In the north the winters are hard, with snow on the ground for five months of the year, and summers not unlike ours; in the middle section the winters are colder and the summers hotter than ours; in the south the winters are mild, and the summers, to our notions, extremely and enervatingly hot. Those climatic differences partly account for the differences in temper and outlook which so sharply marked the North from the South.

It is clear, then, that these thirteen States were far more widely different from one another than are English counties.

Their differences are more like those between England and Scotland or Ulster and Wales. And at a time when communication was very slow, when there were hardly any good roads, and no method of getting about except riding a horse, or going in a horse-drawn vehicle, these differences were very much more marked, and were indeed more a matter of pride, than they have become in days when trains and motor cars have made distances, for practical purposes, so much less.

It was natural, therefore, that when the States came together to try to work out some kind of constitution, they were not at all trying to do what at first glance we might suppose. They did not in the least start by saying, 'What we want is a strong and efficient central government which will weld together all these different States to which we belong into a strong and united country.' On the contrary, each State was saying, 'Just how little of our own rights of governing ourselves need we give up, to make life possible for all of us and enable us to be prosperous?'

The further expansion of the United States can be very briefly summed up.

In 1803, by what is known as 'the Louisiana Purchase', the United States bought from France the whole of the great area within which the States of Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, Wyoming, Minnesota, the Dakotas and Montana were ultimately formed. Florida was acquired from Spain in 1819, and the whole of the rest, that is to say, the land which became the States of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, California, Oregon, Idaho, Washington, came into the possession of the United States in different ways in the three years between 1845 and 1848.

From the very beginning of the existence of the United States as a nation there had been one particular problem which was



sometimes kept in the background by the greater importance of other problems, but sometimes came very much forward and caused feelings to run very high. This was the problem of slavery.

When the first settlers landed in that part of North America which in time became 'the Southern States', they found a great deal of hard work to be done, for which, if they could find it, they could employ more labour than they themselves with their small numbers could provide. They tried to get the Indians to work for them, whether by compelling them or persuading them, but both methods were futile. It then occurred to them that negro slaves from Africa would be useful, and the first ship-load was landed in Virginia in 1619.<sup>1</sup> Slave labour was particularly useful in the southern States with their great plantations, which required workers to do quite mechanical labour in great heat. By 1790 there were about half a million negro slaves in America, more than half of them in the two great States of Virginia and South Carolina. There were also a small number scattered about in New England and the middle States, working on farms or as domestic servants. These were indeed slaves in the sense that they were the property of their masters, but slavery as an institution, with great gangs of slaves working under overseers, hardly existed outside the southern States.

Up till 1820 there was no serious trouble. The northern States, which disapproved of slavery in principle, and to whom it was of no particular advantage in practice, abolished it; the southern States maintained it; and, by a sort of tacit agreement, as new States were admitted they were admitted in pairs, one slave and one free. There had been people, at the time when

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lincoln's '250 years' of the Second Inaugural (see p. 188). The slave trade (in which, by the way, the northern non-slavery state of Massachusetts had been deeply and very profitably engaged) was declared illegal by Congress in 1808. But a few years before the Civil War there was an active movement in some sections of the South for its revival.

the constitution was framed, who hoped that slavery would die a natural death, even in the South, but these hopes were destroyed, or at any rate long deferred, by a particular mechanical invention. In 1793 Eli Whitney invented the 'cotton gin'—i.e. an instrument for clearing cotton of its seeds, which was a process necessary before cotton, as it came off the cotton plant, could be manufactured into cotton for ordinary use. The immediate result was that the export of cotton from the South increased in four years by the fantastic figure of 3000 per cent; and the result of that was that cheap labour was more than ever needed if the wealth lying ready in the fields was to be turned into money; and the result of that was that the South became more than ever determined to retain slavery.

The sleeping dog, which for thirty years had been let lie by both sides because they thought he was a nasty, dangerous brute anyway, and no one quite knew whom he would bite if he woke up, suddenly in 1820 became threateningly alive and awake. The immediate cause was the application by Missouri for admission as a full State, and the reasons for the trouble were partly Missouri's past history and partly Missouri's geographical position. Missouri was part of the Louisiana purchase, and at the time of the purchase Congress had done nothing to interfere with the institution of slavery which already existed, under French and Spanish law, in the new territory so acquired.

It was natural enough, therefore, that the settlers of Missouri should expect that they would be allowed to retain, as citizens of a new State, a right which they had held as settlers of a territory. On the other hand, for thirty years the line which had been generally accepted as marking off the slave States from the free States was the famous 'Mason and Dixon' line, the southern boundary of the State of Pennsylvania, dividing it from Delaware, and nearly all of the new State of Missouri



lay north of this line. The northern States, therefore, not unnaturally, saw in this application by Missouri an attempt to increase the power of the slave States in Congress. Feelings ran extremely high, but in the end a compromise was reached, which is known as the 'Missouri Compromise'. Missouri was admitted as a slave State (and Maine at the same time as a free State), but it was provided that any further States that developed out of the territory of the Louisiana purchase north of the parallel of latitude 36' 30" should be free. This line roughly coincided with the *southern* boundary of Missouri.

It was, on the face of it, an odd and rather clumsy compromise, and it produced, or at any rate contributed to, some awkward results later. The new line, north of which slavery was in future to be prohibited, ran *south* of four existing slave States, and of the one at the moment to be created, whereas an extension of the existing Mason and Dixon line would have run roughly along the northern boundary of Missouri. But when one looks at the map one sees what the difficulty was. By a provision of the North-West Ordinance no slavery was to be permitted in any States which might emerge from the 'North-West Territory', north of the Ohio River, and so the obvious extension of the Mason and Dixon line was out of court, since it would have cut straight through this region.

Anyway, there the compromise was, and both sides got something out of it. The South got a new slave State, and the North not only limited the extension of slavery but also reasserted the right of Congress to limit it as it saw fit in newly developed territory. At least the compromise kept the dangerous question quiet for about thirty years.

One thing it is most important to notice about this dispute. It was not primarily a dispute about the rightness or wrongness of slavery, though that came into it, and with some people

more strongly than with others. It was a dispute about political power, whether one party had the *political* right to abolish something, whether *morally* right or wrong, or the other to retain it. And in the course of the dispute *both sides* were threatening to secede from the Union if they did not get their way. Put it in this way: it became clear that, quite apart from moral judgements about it, slavery was an issue on which feeling ran so high that a violent disagreement about it could endanger the Union. Jefferson, the ex-President, wrote: 'This momentous question, like a fire-bell in the night, awakened me and filled me with horror. I considered it at once as the death-knell of the Union.' And another famous and foresighted American, John Quincy Adams, wrote in his diary: 'I take it for granted that the present question is a mere preamble—a title page to a great tragic volume.' Of that volume the earlier pages Lincoln was going to read, and many of the later pages he was going to write.

The same issue flared up again, in much the same form, thirty years later. In those thirty years some things happened which it will be important to understand and keep in mind when we get back to Lincoln. For one thing, Andrew Jackson was elected President, and not only elected, but after his first four years re-elected for a second term. He was the son of immigrants from North Ireland. His parents were desperately poor, and he had a hard upbringing in western North Carolina, and was trained to the law in Tennessee. He had seen service, and shown himself a first-rate fighter, against both British and Indians. He was completely the frontiersman. He had little education and even less superficial polish. In no country but America could he have risen to the highest position in the State, and he had none of the graces for which America had, on the whole, hitherto looked in her Presidents. But his courage was flawless, he was dead honest, and he had a simple directness of vision for the things that really mattered.



'Old Hickory' was, I think, a really great man. And if he could rise to be President, so could any man who had something of the same quality, even if he shared Jackson's deficiencies.

Jackson was a Southerner, but there was never a more passionate supporter of the Union, though he was a supporter also of States' rights within the Union. And another thing of great importance which had been happening during the years since the constitution was made was a growth of feeling about what 'The Union' meant. At first it was a necessity, something that many people accepted with reluctance, something without which the States could not get along peacefully and profitably; but as time went on more and more people began to feel that the Union was in itself something valuable, something worth striving for and if necessary fighting for. And this feeling came out into the limelight, was fully expressed by a great orator in a great speech, in the year 1830.

For two years before that there had been much talk about 'nullification', the right of a single state to declare null and void any Federal enactment which it thought unjust. South Carolina, and notably a South Carolinian called Calhoun, were hot in support of nullification. (The enactment at the moment in dispute had nothing directly to do with slavery, but was financial.) And the dispute culminated in a great debate in the Senate, which lasted over days, and to which the best speakers of the day contributed. Among them was Daniel Webster. He was a man of real intellectual power, and of first-rate eloquence of the rather elaborate kind that was then popular. To our modern taste the style is rather overstrained and high-falutin; but after all an orator's business is with his immediate audience, and not with readers a century later, and of Webster's power to sway his audiences there is no doubt at all. And even today we, who can only read his speeches, and not hear them, cannot miss the thought and the

passionate sincerity that shines and flames through the cloud and thunder of the rolling periods. On the 26th of January, 1830, Webster delivered one of the most famous of his speeches, and the conclusion of it is so splendid a statement of what the Union meant that it is worth quoting in full.

'It is to that Union we owe our safety at home, and our consideration and dignity abroad. It is to that Union that we are chiefly indebted for whatever makes us most proud of our country. That Union we reached only by the discipline of our virtues in the severe school of adversity. It had its origin in the necessities of disordered finance, prostrate commerce, and ruined credit. Under its benign influences, these great interests immediately awoke, as from the dead, and sprang forth with newness of life. Every year of its duration has teemed with fresh proofs of its utility and its blessings; and although our territory has stretched out wider and wider, and our population spread farther and farther, they have not outrun its protection or its benefits. It has been to us all a copious fountain of national, social, and personal happiness.

'I have not allowed myself, Sir, to look beyond the Union, to see what might lie hidden in the dark recess behind. I have not coolly weighed the chances of preserving liberty when the bonds that unite us together shall be broken asunder. I have not accustomed myself to hang over the precipice of disunion, to see whether, with my short sight, I can fathom the depth of the abyss below; nor could I regard him as a safe counsellor in the affairs of this government, whose thoughts should be mainly bent on considering, not how the Union may be best preserved, but how tolerable might be the condition of the people when it should be broken up and destroyed. While the Union lasts we have high, exciting, gratifying prospects spread out before us, for us and our children. Beyond that I seek not to penetrate the veil. God grant that in my day at least that curtain may not rise! God grant that on my vision never may be opened what lies behind! When my eyes shall be turned to behold for the last time the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonoured fragments of a once glorious Union; on States dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood! Let their last feeble and lingering glance rather behold the gorgeous ensign of the republic, now known and honoured throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original lustre, not a stripe erased or polluted, not a single star obscured, bearing for its motto,



no such miserable interrogatory as "What is all this worth?" nor those other words of delusion and folly, "Liberty first and Union afterwards"; but everywhere, spread all over in characters of living light, blazing on all its ample folds, as they float over the sea and over the land, and in every wind under the whole heavens, that other sentiment, dear to every true American heart—Liberty *and* Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!

Two months later the challenge was plain, the gage was thrown down, and Jefferson picked it up. A dinner was arranged for Jefferson's birthday, and the supporters of nullification, hoping that Jackson's loyalty to the Union would turn out to be little more than lip-service, and that as he was a Carolinian his heart was really with them, stressed the rightness of nullification in all the speeches and toasts. They had mistaken their man. When it came to his turn to propose a toast he rose, looked at Calhoun, and gave them, 'Our Union—It must be preserved.' Calhoun replied with another, 'Our Union, next to our liberty, most dear.' There you have it. To Jackson and to Webster the Union came first, as the only framework within which the freedom of the States and the individual could be strong and effective. To those who felt like Calhoun the Union came second, and their State and its wishes first.

Two years later South Carolina passed a Nullification Ordinance, denied the right of Federal officers to collect customs, and threatened secession if any attempt was made to collect them by force. Jackson acted at once. The garrisons of two forts, Fort Moultrie and the later famous Fort Sumter at Charleston, were reinforced, and revenue cutters were ordered to collect the revenue if the customs officials were opposed. South Carolina retorted by raising a volunteer force 'to resist invasion'. In the end a compromise was reached and bloodshed avoided. The tariff to which South Carolina objected was to some considerable extent modified by Congress, and thereupon the Nullification Ordinance was repealed. Jackson in his

direct way would have preferred to take all the risks and go through with it. He was longer sighted than many of his advisers, and after the compromise had been reached he wrote to a friend some memorable words, which we ought to bear in mind whenever we are thinking about the causes of the Civil War, and are perhaps tempted to think that it was a war about slavery. Jackson said: 'The tariff, it is now well known, was a mere pretext, and disunion and a Southern confederacy the real object. The next pretext will be the negro or slavery question.'

I have spent so much time on this, on something which you may be feeling had very little to do with Lincoln, for three reasons. First, it made it clear that at least one Southern State was prepared to secede, or at least threaten to secede, and break up the Union, on *any* issue which it thought important enough. Second, it made it clear that 'the Union' had become something more than a convenience; it had become an ideal. Third, the events of those years are a curiously exact foreshadowing of, almost a rehearsal for, the events of thirty years later, and upon those later events they had a quite direct, and perhaps disastrous, influence. South Carolina had learned, or thought she had learned, a very welcome lesson; it was also a very dangerous lesson. She had, to a considerable extent, imposed her will upon Congress and upon a strong President. She had some justification for thinking later that if she bluffed hard enough her bluff would not be called.

To return now to the slavery question. By 1850 all the old troubles had flared up again. And they flared up mainly because of something which no one could have stopped even if he had wanted to, namely, the expansion of America westwards. You will remember that in the three years from 1845 to 1848 enormous new territories came into the possession of the United States. And the admission of the consequent new States to the Union made the old issue again a very live



one.<sup>1</sup> There were four main schools of thought, two extremist and two moderate. The Southern extremists pressed for the maximum extension of slavery, the Northern extremists for its maximum restriction. One moderate group proposed the extension of the Missouri Compromise line right out to the west coast, and the other proposed to leave the question to the popular vote *by States*; settlers could enter the new lands with or without slaves, and when a territory was to become a State it was to decide for itself whether it was to be slave or free. A compromise of an unsatisfactory kind was arrived at, over the details of which we need not delay, since it brought an uneasy peace for no more than four years.

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noticing that this expansion involved possibilities, even if they were in the distant future, not only about the *extension* of slavery, but about a quite different, and to the South much more vital, problem, its *abolition*. A glance at the map, and the shape of the United States, shows that there was room for more newly formed states in the northern, or 'free', part of the new territory than in the south. To a long view, therefore, the possibility presented itself that there might in time be enough northern states to form the three-quarters majority needed to abolish slavery by an amendment to the Constitution.

# 5

## LINCOLN EMERGES AS A NATIONAL FIGURE

In 1854 the curtain rang up on the fourth act of the drama, and on to the stage Lincoln emerged from his lawyer's office into the full blaze of the limelight of public life in which he moved for ten years till his death.

The first figure to walk on to the stage was Senator Douglas of Illinois, commonly known as 'the little giant'. He was a stocky little man, with a great head on a short body, unlimited vigour, a good deal of charm, plenty of horse-sense, very few principles, and a talent for extremely effective oratory. The question which brought him into prominence was that of the settlement of the country which is now the States of Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming, the Dakotas and Montana.

The development of this country was being blocked, by all means in its power, by the State of Missouri. This, you will remember, had been admitted as a slave State; but the territory now under discussion was north of the line of the Missouri Compromise, and was therefore forbidden to slavery. If the territory was settled quickly, and then rapidly transformed into States, Missouri saw the prospect of free States on her borders. The easy movement of her own slave-owning people



into new country would be blocked, and even apart from that the escape of slaves across the border would be easy. Douglas, not in the least interested in any abstract question of slavery, but for a variety of reasons, some quite creditable (on a short view) and some not, but very much interested in the rapid development of the territory under discussion, cut through the difficulties by the 'Kansas-Nebraska Bill'. This permitted settlers to move into the territory with or without slaves, and left the ultimate decision to a popular vote of the settlers; but, in order to make any sense of this provision, it had to be stated in so many words that the Missouri Compromise was a dead letter.

Douglas got his way, but the passage of the bill into law had results that went far beyond anything that his short-sighted vision had foreseen. There was something like civil war between the 'free' settlers from the North and the slave-owning settlers from the South; a new party came into being, the 'Republican' party, pledged to oppose any further extension of slavery by all means in their power, but not at all 'Abolitionist', since they admitted the right of the Southern States to maintain slavery; friction between North and South increased because the North took the line that, the Missouri Compromise being broken, they were no longer bound by the Fugitive Slave law under which they had been bound, however reluctantly, to return escaped slaves to their owners.

Douglas came back to Springfield to justify himself and made a long speech, giving, as he said, an account of his stewardship to the State of which he was Senator. It was a clever speech, three hours of special pleading, making a pretty good best of a weak case, but doing it by running away from the real point, and not only running away from it but pretending that the real point was something else. He argued that the point in dispute was not slavery and the extension of it, but 'popular sovereignty', the question whether the voters should

control their own affairs. And then he made an error of tactics by suggesting that if the settlers in Kansas and Nebraska were able to govern themselves they were surely able to govern their negroes.

The next day Lincoln replied. It was his first big speech on a big issue. In his earlier speeches he had been engaged in winning votes for himself or for some matter of domestic politics. His style had been modelled on that of Webster, and because it was not his natural way of speaking the imitation had not been a very successful one. Where Webster thundered and lightened, Lincoln was apt to be verbosely pompous; where Webster was vivid, Lincoln was often merely frothy. But this time he was not wanting to catch votes; he was wanting to make people think straight and show that Douglas was trying to make them think crooked. He was not trying to make debating points; he was trying to set out the truth on a great issue as he saw it. He quit imitating other people and became himself.

The result was one of the most remarkable performances that any public figure ever made as his first big speech. It was very quiet, it had no oratorical tricks, and to read it is like listening to a man thinking aloud, though its original hearers were gripped by the passionate earnestness of the speaker. No doubt those original hearers expected Lincoln to grasp his big chance and try to smash Douglas in debate. In fact he hardly troubled to argue with Douglas in detail, though he dealt with most of Douglas's main points. He simply cut the whole ground from under Douglas's feet by taking it for granted that Douglas was not even trying to deal with the main issue. He said, in effect: 'I propose that we do not go chasing the Senator down a side-road, however much he would like us to. Our business is on the main highway of the politics and the life of our country. This highway has at the moment come to a dead end, and it is our business to make up our minds in what



direction and against what difficulties we are going to drive its future course. We all have to think, and I am going to tell you how far my thinking has got me.'

The speech is so characteristic of its speaker that we must examine it in some detail. Lincoln made 'greater' speeches later. The 'House Divided' speech was politically more important; the Second Inaugural is far more moving, and the speech at Gettysburg in a class all by itself; but I am not sure that in any of his speeches one sees more clearly his habit of hard honest thought, his instinctive vision of the things that really matter, his understanding of the way in which men do in fact behave, and as a result his hard practical commonsense knowledge of what in practice can and cannot be done. Lincoln was, I think, one of those very rare people who hold high ideals, clearly thought out and firmly based, ideals which they never forsake, but who yet have the wisdom, founded on experience, to know that in this world, for the most part, in order to realize even three-quarters of your ideal you have to be prepared to give up the other quarter, and that even in securing that portion of it you have to work with imperfect human instruments.

However, that is anticipating. I don't want to ram my idea of Lincoln down anyone's throat. For the same reason I am not going to say in advance how I think Lincoln's views about slavery fitted in with his views on other things, though we shall have to come back to that rather difficult question later. Meantime the speech is waiting to be examined. (It is, by the way, usually known as the 'Peoria speech'; it was delivered twice, the second time at Peoria, and after the second delivery Lincoln came home and wrote it out in full for publication.)

He began by saying that he was hardly the man to be put up to reply to Douglas, the distinguished Senator and famous debater. In fact much of his speech would not be a direct reply to Douglas. Then, concluding his introduction, he said this: 'I

do not propose to question the patriotism or to assail the motives of any man or class of men, but rather to confine myself to the naked merits of the question.'

He then got to work on the naked merits of the question. He first went back in history, and showed that there had never been any laws *establishing* slavery; all the laws concerning it were made to restrict or prohibit it. He then gave reasons for holding slavery to be a monstrous injustice, and made it perfectly clear that about this central point he had no doubt at all. But he did *not* go on to draw the easy but unthinkingly impractical conclusion that it was therefore everyone's duty immediately to abolish it, and that the South was wickedly and wilfully blind not to see this. On the contrary, he went on with some very quiet and balanced thinking, as quietly expressed. 'Let me say I think I have no prejudice against the southern people.' (Notice, even here, the careful accuracy of that 'I think'—there *may* be a prejudice of which he is not conscious, but he is not aware of one.) 'They are just what we would be in their situation. If slavery did not now exist among them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist among us, we should not instantly give it up.' (Then he realizes that that, as it stands, is too general, and all generalizations are dangerous, so he qualifies it.) 'This I believe of the masses North and South. Doubtless there are individuals on both sides who would not hold slaves under any circumstances, and others who would gladly introduce slavery anew if it were out of existence. We know that some southern men do free their slaves, go North and become tiptop Abolitionists, while some northern ones go South and become most cruel slave-masters.'

Then he turns to consider what can be done in practice. 'When southern people tell us they are no more responsible for the origin of slavery than we are, I acknowledge the fact. When it is said that the institution exists, and that it is very



difficult to get rid of it in any satisfactory way, I can understand and appreciate the saying. I surely will not blame them for not doing what I should not know how to do myself.' That last sentence is pure Lincoln. He had often heard in the North two kinds of violent denunciation. There was the denunciation of slavery as an institution. With that, as he made plain early in his speech, he agreed. He had hated slavery ever since his first trip to New Orleans, and he hated it steadily till the end of his life. There was the denunciation of the South for not abolishing slavery with a stroke of the pen. Much of this denunciation was sincere, some of it was pharisaical, but on all of it Lincoln poured some cold water of common sense, and on the pharisaical part of it a challenge to honesty. It is both practically silly and morally dishonest to curse at people for not doing something, however desirable, unless you can show them how to do it—unless, that is, you have thought out how you would do it if you were in their place.

So he examined the possibilities. Ship the negroes out of America? Where to? The world was not full of spaces into which a large number of negroes could be transplanted, even if, so transplanted and left to fend for themselves as free men, they were not much more likely to die off than to live happily. In what ships? And how financed? Or should they all be freed and kept in America as underlings? Was it at all certain that this would better their condition? Or free them and make them politically and socially equal, with equal votes, equal rights of intermarriage, and so on? And then speaks the practical statesman who knows what can and what cannot be done. 'My own feelings will not admit of this, and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of the whites will not. Whether this feeling accords with justice and sound judgement is not the sole question, if indeed it is any part of it. A universal feeling, whether well or ill founded, cannot be safely disregarded. We cannot then make them equals.' And

then comes another characteristic sentence. He has an idea of the lines along which the solution may be found, but he has not thought it out, and he will not say he is sure when he is only feeling his way. 'It does seem to me that systems of gradual emancipation might be adopted, but for their tardiness in this I will not undertake to judge our brethren of the South.'

But the fact that the abolition of an evil is difficult, and must be slow, is no argument for allowing the evil to *spread*. The spread of slavery can be justified on only one assumption, and Lincoln states that assumption plainly. 'Inasmuch as you do not object to my taking my hog to Nebraska, therefore I must not object to your taking your slave. Now, I admit that this is perfectly logical, *if there is no difference between hogs and slaves.*'

He then demonstrates that the South itself gives away its real feelings in its practice if not in its theory, and shows that it does feel a difference between slaves and other forms of property or merchandise. He outlines the attitude of the Southern slave-owner to the Southern slave-dealer. 'You despise him utterly. You do not recognize him as a friend, or even as an honest man. Your children must not play with his; they may rollick freely with the little negroes, but not with the slave-dealer's children. If you are obliged to deal with him, you try to get through the job without so much as touching him, instinctively shrinking from the snaky contact. If he grows rich and retires from business, you still remember him, and still keep up the ban of non-intercourse upon him and his family. Now why is this? You do not so treat the man who deals in corn, cotton, or tobacco.' Further, how was one to account for the number of free negroes? There were some four hundred thousand of them, and all these had at one time been slaves. They therefore represented a loss of capital to their owners of perhaps five hundred dollars a head. No group of men would sacrifice two hundred million dollars by giving



up any ordinary form of goods. This sacrifice must have been made by men who felt that for some reason slaves were different from other goods, and that they had a right to their own lives. 'And now why will you ask us to deny the humanity of the slave, and estimate him as only the equal of the hog? Why ask us to do what you will not do yourselves? Why ask us to do for nothing what two hundred million dollars could not induce you to do?'<sup>1</sup>

Then, having restated the gulf that divided him from the Abolitionists, he came to grips with Douglas direct over the Kansas-Nebraska bill, and exposed the woolliness of the fine-sounding phrase 'popular sovereignty' by the simple method of applying a little logical thinking to it. Whether what Douglas proposed was a good thing or a bad thing could be argued on several grounds; but whether it was, as Douglas asserted, 'popular sovereignty' depended on one thing and one thing only: whether the negro was or was not a man. 'If he is not a man, in that case he who is a man may as a matter of self-government do just what he pleases with him. But if the negro is a man, is it not to that extent a total destruction of self-government to say that he too shall not govern himself? When the white man governs himself, that is self-government; but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government—that is despotism. . . . No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent. I say this is the leading principle, the sheet anchor of American republicanism.'

<sup>1</sup> This argument is sometimes regarded as unsound. Its strength or weakness depends on whether the bulk of the emancipated slaves had been the property of the great slave-owners, and the exact figures about this are hard to determine. The point is that the emancipation of a slave meant a loss of capital. A wealthy owner might emancipate a number of slaves much as a wealthy man today may make a donation to charity by a transference of capital. But a poor man tends to make his charitable donations out of income, since the loss of capital is a serious matter for him and his immediate heirs. If, therefore, any large proportion of the freed slaves had been the property of the poorer owners, it is reasonable to infer that some sense of moral responsibility prompted the action.



Finally, he exposed the dangers to the Union which the bill involved, through the simultaneous immigration of slave-owning and 'free' settlers. 'Could there be a more apt invention to bring about collision and violence on the slavery question than this Nebraska project is? I do not charge or believe that such was intended by Congress'—a phrase so quiet that it is easy to miss the bite of its irony; it is saying in effect that Congress could not see an inch in front of its nose, as what follows plainly shows—'but if they had literally formed a ring and placed champions within it to fight out the controversy, the fight could be no more likely to come off than it is. And if this fight should begin, is it likely to take a very peaceful, Union-saving turn? Will not the first drop of blood so shed be the real knell of the Union?' Therefore, for the sake of the Union, the Missouri Compromise ought to be restored. If it was not restored, there would be 'the South flushed with triumph and tempted to excess; the North, betrayed as they believe, brooding on wrong and burning for revenge. One side will provoke, the other resent. The one will taunt, the other defy. Already a few in the North defy all constitutional restraints, resist the execution of the Fugitive Slave Laws, and even menace the institution of slavery where it exists.' That last sentence is of first-rate importance for the understanding of Lincoln, both now and later. Nothing could excuse an attempt to remedy a wrong by illegal means; the law was the law and must be obeyed, even if you thought it was a bad law. The way to go to work was to get the law altered, not to violate it.

In the course of the speech came one memorable passage, the end of which foreshadows the later 'House Divided' speech, and the beginning of which has something of that majestic simplicity of thought and that gravity, almost melancholy of cadence, which marked even more strongly his later and greater speeches. 'Little by little, but steadily as a



man's march to the grave, we have been giving up the old for the new faith. Near eighty years ago we began by declaring that all men are created equal; but now from that beginning we have run down to the other declaration that for some men to enslave others is a "sacred right of self-government". These principles cannot stand together. They are as opposite as God and Mammon; whoever holds to the one must despise the other.'

Lincoln spoke for three hours, and by the end of the three hours a new public figure had stepped forward in America. Two comments on the speech are worth remembering. One from a farmer: 'I don't keer for them great orators. I want to hear jist a plain common feller like the rest on us, thet I kin foller and know where he's driving. Abe Linkern fills the bill.' That was a great part of Lincoln's strength for the next ten years. He was a plain man of the people, and though 'superior persons' in the North despised him, and in the South both despised and hated him, the great mass of the supporters of the Union found in him a leader whom they could understand. They knew also that when he spoke it was with the honest man's wish to make his meaning clear, not with the dishonest orator's aim to cloud his meaning in a mist of words.

The second was from Douglas himself. Part was in words; he told Lincoln that he had given him more trouble than all the Senate put together. The other part was in action and was even more significant. He offered to speak no more in the campaign if Lincoln would do the same. This was something very near to an admission of defeat, though he may also have thought that if he could prevent Lincoln repeating his success people might forget the Peoria speech or think it had been no more than a flash in the pan. But anyway Douglas had the wits to know that now in his hustling career, in which he had ridden rough-shod over much opposition, he had at last fetched up against something which he could not override.

He had run his head into a block of granite, which he must either blow up or ride round.

This is perhaps as good a place as another to say at any rate something about a point which will often crop up again later, and about which anyone who is trying to make for himself a picture of Lincoln must make up his mind. That is, Lincoln's attitude towards slavery. In the many books written about Lincoln you will find two main lines of thought. Some writers—particularly of course those who feel passionately about slavery, and think of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* not only as a most moving book, which it certainly is, but also as a kind of Bible at once inspired and accurate, which it even more certainly is not—try to show that the Civil War was a war for the abolition of slavery, that to Lincoln in the last years of his life slavery was the main issue, and that as his vision grew clearer and clearer he moved farther and farther from his own earlier attitude, until with the Proclamation of Emancipation he felt that he had performed his one great duty.

Other writers take rather the view that the one great object of Lincoln's later years was the preservation of the Union, that the Union was his great ideal to which everything else came second, that the abolition of slavery was therefore a side-issue, and that the Emancipation Proclamation was no more than a tactical move in the Civil War; and that the Civil War itself was a war to save the Union, a war not against slavery but against secession.

The two views might be called very roughly the 'moral' and the 'political' views of Lincoln. Both views, I think, are mistaken; I think that the truth is to be found, as it has a way of being found, somewhere between, but a very great deal nearer the second, the 'political' view, than the first. And the reason for the mistakenness of the extremists on either side is that they move more easily among ideas than among people;



they do not understand, or at least do not stop to consider, how the ordinary man behaves, and how mixed his motives may be. The fanatic is a simple person; he sees one aim in front of him, and he goes for it, not caring in the least how many things, some of them valuable, he may knock down in getting to his goal; everything else is trivial. The world sometimes needs fanatics, but not too many of them. For the ordinary man it is quite easy and natural to have two things for which he passionately cares and yet to know that one of them matters more than the other. Lincoln was the farthest possible remove from a fanatic. It is part of his greatness that his mind moved in the same way as the minds of ordinary men, though it often went far deeper than theirs. He passionately hated slavery; and he passionately loved the Union. But at no time in his life, I think, had he any doubt that the love of the one was stronger and mattered more than the hatred of the other. If the abolition of slavery was consistent with saving the Union, even better if it would contribute to saving the Union, he would thank God and pursue two things that he cared about at once. But the abolition had to come second. We shall come later to a famous letter which he wrote to a newspaper editor in the middle of the Civil War, when his vision, if ever, should have been clear; and I can never see how the supporters of the 'moral' view can get round it. And there was something else that Lincoln cared about. I said earlier that it was important to remember that Lincoln was a lawyer. He had a profound respect for law. Without respect for law, in his view, civilized life could not be carried on. Therefore he had no use at all for trying to secure an aim, however right in itself, by breaking the law, for trying to get the right thing in the wrong way. That explains his attitude towards John Brown, which many people think cold and almost cowardly.

Now let us go back to the Peoria speech, and sum up what in that speech Lincoln did in fact say. Some things in it he said



better, more tellingly, in later speeches, but I am not clear that he said anything very different later. According to the 'moral' view, this speech represents Lincoln before he 'saw the light', and a very able writer tries to persuade us that Lincoln was in a state of complete muddle when he delivered it. He says this: 'He spoke of the monstrous injustice of slavery . . . but he concluded with a strong plea against interfering with it. Observe the hopeless inconsistency of the argument. Slavery is good enough for the 5,000,000 slaves of the South. On their hands the chains are to stay for ever as their part of the Declaration of Independence. . . . Slavery is good enough for a quarter of a continent. But if a group of happy people of the South propose to go out into empty Arizona with a group of their happy slaves . . . that is a hideous moral wrong. The argument is trash.'

It is hard to believe that this writer has had the elementary honesty to read what Lincoln said with any attempt to understand it. Of course the argument, as stated, is trash, and I should like to have heard Lincoln tearing it to ribbons. But the argument, as stated, is not what Lincoln said, nor anywhere near what Lincoln said. He did not say that slavery was a good thing in the South; he merely said that it was *there*, an established institution. That was a plain fact, which no amount of wishing could prevent from being a fact. What he said was, in effect, this: 'Slavery is an evil thing, in the South or anywhere else. Therefore we will prevent, or at any rate strictly limit, its extension. That is in practice feasible, and will probably not break the Union. It can also be done legally. The problem of slavery in the South is another matter. There too it is evil. But to abolish it immediately would be practically very difficult; it is not by any means clear that it would immediately make the slaves happier, and it would almost certainly break the Union.'

Now that argument may be wrong; but it is manifestly not



trash, nor even illogical. It is plain common sense. And to say that Lincoln took the Declaration of Independence as riveting the fetters on the slaves is just plain nonsense. His argument was precisely the other way. But he did take the line that to attempt to stamp out an evil by ways impracticably abrupt might easily lead to the creation of another evil worse than the one that was to be remedied. And this greater evil was, in his view, the disruption of the Union. He saw in the future a great united American nation. To that end he was, I think, prepared, rightly or wrongly, to sacrifice anything except honesty; but he also, I think, believed that within the preserved Union slavery could be dealt with and abolished by gradual steps. Nothing was more certain to fasten the fetters on the existing slaves, at any rate for a very long time, than secession by the South, and secession on the issue of slavery. A thing you have won by strong action is a thing you tend to hold on to even if it is a wrong thing and even if it turns out to be less profitable than you thought it would be.

This is perhaps the best place for a word or two about slavery and the feeling of the South about it. As with Lincoln's views on slavery, you will find two very different pictures drawn by extremists at either end. One picture will show you happy slaves, rather like children, well looked after by their masters, well fed, well housed, and not wanting anything much more out of life but to go on picking cotton day after day. The other picture, that of the violent Northern abolitionists, will show you the slave ill fed and cruelly treated, flogged when he did not work hard enough, and pursued with all kinds of brutal savagery if he tried to escape.

The true picture again is somewhere between the two extremes, but probably a great deal nearer to the first than to the second. In the first place, to put it at the lowest, it was not good business for the slave-owner to drive his slaves with

cruelty, because he got less work out of them. In the second place, the slave-owner was not a slave-owner because he enjoyed tyrannizing over other people and being cruel to them. The bulk of the slave-owners were slave-owners because they lived in a land where slave labour was the ordinary kind of labour. They were perfectly kindly humane people and they treated their slaves with at least as much kindness as they treated their horses. The ordinary slave-owner looked after his old slaves, when they grew too old for work, with complete kindness. So far as the ordinary conditions of life were concerned, the slave was probably better off than many factory workers in the North, and certainly better off than the children in England who were used for labour in the mines. Further, it is important to remember that the great majority of the slaves were not men and women who had once been free and therefore were all the time rebelling against a change from freedom to slavery. Just as their owners had never known any way of life except one which included the owning of slaves, so the slaves had never known any way of life except that of being slaves.

There was of course a blacker side to the picture. When you got a bad slave-owner, or possibly even just a careless one who left his slaves entirely in charge of a brutal overseer, the misery of the slaves might be extreme. And there was no question about the brutality of treatment for a slave who tried to escape. Then again, if a slave-owner fell on bad days and had to give up his plantation and sell his slaves, there came one of the cruellest things about slavery, that in the slave market the families were apt to be split up.

The real charge against slavery, and what made it an evil thing, was not in the least that the majority of the slaves led unhappy or even, in material things, desperately uncomfortable lives. It was simply this: that it is wrong that any one man should own any other man as a piece of property, should own



him as much as he owns his dining-table or his dog or his horse. Slavery did not, for the slaves, necessarily destroy contentment; but it did, quite inevitably, destroy something far more vital to a decent human life, and that was hope. The free workman might be worse housed and worse fed than the slave, but he could hope, by his own efforts, to rise to something better; the owned slave, the chattel, could not. And it is worth remembering that this kind of ownership is probably at least as bad in the long run for the owner as for the owned.

One should try to get some picture of what the bulk of people in the South themselves thought about this 'peculiar institution', as it was often described. Some of them were prepared to support it in principle, and their arguments were weak. Some were prepared to support it on purely business grounds as being profitable. But the greater part of them accepted it simply as something which they were used to, as part of their ordinary way of life. They liked the negroes, so long as the negroes were kept in their place. They had far less sense of the colour bar than they have now, when the negroes are free. Their own children were probably nursed by black nannies and played with the piccaninnies. It is quite true that, as Lincoln pointed out, they gave themselves away by their attitude towards the slave-dealer, but this did not affect what they felt about the slave himself. At the root of a great deal of the bitter Southern opposition to the abolition of slavery was not a clearly thought-out support of slavery as an institution desirable on principle. It was something much more unconscious than that—they resented interference with a way of life which had been good enough for their fathers and was good enough for them. No doubt the North was right in considering slavery an evil, but it is very easy to feel strongly about the evil of something which has never been part of your own way of life and is never likely to have any connection with your own way of life.



In May of 1856 came the famous so-called 'Lost Speech'. It was a lost speech for two interesting reasons. Some delegates had come from Chicago, and a meeting with speeches was in full cry. There were loud demands that Lincoln should get on to the platform and speak to them. Up got the long, loose-jointed, shambling figure, and the reporters all licked their pencils and got ready to write. By the time he had been speaking for about five minutes the reporters were so excited that they forgot to go on reporting. As a result there was no shorthand record of this speech. And in the second place, Lincoln himself, who was ready to have most of his speeches printed, had thought that this speech was too full of passion to be wholly desirable committed to print. We therefore have it, and that in a form no doubt not quite exact, only because a young lawyer who was present managed to keep his head enough to make some notes and was blessed with an admirable memory. He recorded it subsequently. And a good deal of it as he recorded it 'feels' so exactly like Lincoln that I think we may suppose that it is not at any rate very far from what Lincoln said. I fancy it is the first, and possibly indeed the only, speech of Lincoln's that really carried his audience away. Any orator who persuaded hard-bitten reporters to lay down their pencils and note-books and listen to him, instead of getting on with their professional job, would know that he had scored a most unusual triumph.

Lincoln made his usual rather tentative, almost awkward, beginning, but after a minute or two he really got down to business. He said, quite quietly, 'We are in a trying time,' and then, very slowly and very impressively, 'unless popular opinion makes itself very strongly felt, and a change is made in our present course, *blood will flow on account of Nebraska, and brother's hand will be raised against brother!*'

He then, very characteristically, laid down the lines on which their thinking ought to move. He admitted that they had all



been deeply stirred by a speech which had just been delivered on the hardships in a particular district of those opposed to slavery, and said that all true men ought to be willing to do anything possible to put these wrongs right. But—and what he then said is something that all excited and vote-catching politicians might well remember:

‘We must not promise what we ought not, lest we be called on to perform what we cannot; we must be calm and moderate, and consider the whole difficulty, and determine what is possible and just. We must not be led by excitement and passion to do that which our sober judgements would not approve in our cooler moments.’

The text of the whole speech, a text which he repeated several times, was a simple one: ‘slavery must be kept out of Kansas.’ As he said, and rightly said, ‘the test, the pinch, is right there. If we lose Kansas to freedom, an example will be set which will prove fatal to freedom in the end.’ And a little later he said that unless the Nebraska Bill could be headed off, ‘we are in a fair way to see this land of boasted freedom converted into a land of slavery in fact’. This remark was followed, not unnaturally, by what the young lawyer described as ‘sensation’.

When the sensation had subsided, Lincoln made the typically plain remark, as though the point was so obvious that the sensation was rather surprising, ‘Just open your two eyes and see if this be not so.’ He then went back, as he was fond of doing, to the Declaration of Independence and pointed out that it said that all men were created equal, whereas now the supporters of slavery wanted to make that read, ‘All white men were created equal’; and that plenty of speakers were now trying to dismiss the declaration as unimportant, one of them calling it ‘a self-evident lie’ and another ‘a string of glittering generalities’. He emphasized that in the early days of the constitution slavery was recognized as an evil, even though a necessary evil, by both North and South, and that petitions

for the abolition of slavery were presented to the very first Congress by both Virginia and Massachusetts. What in this speech, as in others, he is trying to show is that, so far from the original founders of the constitution having fastened slavery upon the United States, they had expected it to die a natural death, while their successors had been deliberately trying to extend its range. Here is Lincoln in his homeliest and most vigorous form:

'Every Fourth of July our young orators all proclaim this to be "the land of the *free* and the home of the brave"! Well, now, when you orators get that off next year, and, may be, this very year, how would you like some old grizzled farmer to get up in the grove and deny it? (Laughter.) How would you like that? But suppose Kansas comes in as a slave State, and all the "border ruffians" have barbecues about it, and free-State men come trailing back to the dishonoured North, like whipped dogs with their tails between their legs, it is—ain't it?—evident that this is no more the "land of the free"; and if we let it go so, we won't dare to say "home of the brave" out loud. (Sensation and confusion.)'

And here, a little later, is Lincoln the lawyer and Lincoln the supporter of the Union:

'We allow slavery to exist in the slave States—not because slavery is right or good, but from the necessities of our Union. We grant a fugitive slave law because it is so "nominated in the bond", because our fathers so stipulated—had to—and we are bound to carry out this agreement. But they did not agree to introduce slavery in regions where it did not previously exist. On the contrary, they said by their example and teachings that they did not deem it expedient—did not consider it right—to do so; and it is wise and right to do just as they did about it (Voices: "Good!"), and that is what we propose—not to interfere with slavery where it exists (we have never tried to do it), and to give them a reasonable and efficient fugitive slave law. (A voice: "No!") I say YES! (Applause.) It was part of the bargain, and I'm for living up to it; but I go no further; I'm not bound to do more, and I won't agree any further. (Great applause.)'

That, I think, is an important passage. He hates slavery but he



is going to stick to an agreement. But, as though he was determined to convince people both in his audience and, if they needed convincing, people long after, of his feelings about slavery, within five minutes comes the following:

‘The revolution’ (i.e. the abolition of slavery) ‘which we will accomplish will be none the less radical from being the result of pacific measures. The battle of freedom is to be fought out on principle. Slavery is a violation of the eternal right. We have temporized with it from the necessities of our condition; but *as sure as God reigns and school children read*, **THAT BLACK FOUL LIE CAN NEVER BE CONSECRATED INTO GOD’S HALLOWED TRUTH!**’ (Immense applause, lasting some time.)

And there are some people who even after reading that—if they have had the honesty to read it—will still tell us that Lincoln did not see the light about slavery until some time in 1863. He ended his speech with two great passages. The first nailed to the mast, as it were, his determination to keep the law and preserve the Union. The second showed that he foresaw the possibility that in the end there might be nothing for it but war.

‘We must make this a land of liberty in fact, as it is in name. But in seeking to attain these results—so indispensable if the liberty which is our pride and boast shall endure—we will be loyal to the Constitution and to the “flag of our Union”, and no matter what our grievance—even though Kansas shall come in as a slave State; and no matter what theirs—even if we shall restore the Compromise—**WE WILL SAY TO THE SOUTHERN DISUNIONISTS WE WON’T GO OUT OF THE UNION, AND YOU SHAN’T!!!**’ (This was the climax; the audience rose to its feet *en masse*, applauded, stamped, waved handkerchiefs, threw hats in the air, and ran riot for several minutes.)

‘There is both a power and a magic in popular opinion. To that let us now appeal; and while, in all probability, no resort to force will be needed, our moderation and forbearance will stand us in good stead when, if ever, **WE MUST MAKE AN APPEAL TO BATTLE AND TO THE GOD OF HOSTS!!**’ (Immense applause and a rush for the orator.)

Some of the comments that were made on this speech suggest

that it was the first thing which so impressed its hearers that they began to think of Lincoln as a possible candidate for the Presidency.

Lincoln's next important speech was concerned with what is known as the 'Dred Scott' decision of the Supreme Court. This was to do with the rights of a particular slave who had been taken out of slave territory into free territory and then back again into slave territory. The legal points were intricate and, though they are interesting to a lawyer, not now very important, since the whole controversy was soon swallowed up in more important events. But one short passage of Lincoln's speech is worth quoting. Douglas had been supporting the decision, and supporting it by trying to show that all those who were against slavery declared, by their opposition to it, that they not only wanted the negroes to be given the full rights of free men, but that they also wanted to share their whole lives with them. That, as Lincoln put it,

'they want to vote, and eat, and sleep, and marry with negroes! He will have it that they cannot be consistent else. Now I protest against the counterfeit logic which concludes that because I do not want a black woman for a slave, I must necessarily want her for a wife. I need not have her for either. I can just leave her alone. In some respects she certainly is not my equal; but in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own hands without asking leave of anyone else, she is my equal, and the equal of all others.'

A year later Lincoln delivered one of his most famous speeches which, because of one particular phrase in it, has always had a sort of head-line title and is called the 'House Divided' speech. The occasion was Lincoln's nomination as a candidate for the senatorship to run against Douglas. He took a great deal of trouble with it; he wrote it with great care, and then, as he was always apt to do both then and later, he submitted it to his friends for comment. Almost all of them



said that it went too far. He read it to his young partner Herndon in his office, and Herndon said, 'If you deliver that speech as read, it will go far to make you President.' He read it to a dozen prudent and practised political friends, and they said it was far too radical, ahead of its time, and certain to lose votes. Lincoln considered their comments and delivered the speech precisely as he had written it.

It opened very quietly, and wisely:

'If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it.'

I am not sure that more political wisdom could easily be compressed into twenty-five words. Any statesman worthy of the name ought in any crisis to consider four things. The trouble with a great many statesmen is that they refuse to consider more than two or even one of them. A statesman needs to size up the situation as it exists, and then to see as best he can how it is likely to develop. If he does not take the trouble to do that, he is going to act blindfold. He then has to decide along what general lines he wants the crisis to subside. But that is not nearly enough, and he has to consider by what detailed practical moves he can achieve the end he wants. And very different qualities are required for those four different stages of progress. Few statesmen, unhappily, have all the qualities. Lincoln himself had not all the qualities in equal measure, but at least he saw, quite clearly and quite simply, the picture of the ideal statesman, and he drew it, with firm lines, in that one sentence. Then he went on to the famous passage. He pointed out that for five years the agitation about slavery had been steadily growing.

'In my opinion it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect

the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.'

After this first speech Lincoln readily accepted a challenge from Douglas to engage in a series of seven debates all over the State of Illinois in which they would directly oppose one another. To put it at the lowest, Lincoln gave at least as good as he got. To Douglas's clever oratory he opposed plain, clear thinking. The details of the speeches do not particularly matter. In the upshot Lincoln was defeated by Douglas for the senatorship, but he was quite clear in his own mind that he had brought off what he wanted. He had forced Douglas to declare himself in a way which made it as near as might be certain that Douglas could never be elected President of the United States, because parts of what he had said would go too far for some of his possible supporters and parts would not go far enough for others.

In October, 1859, came the most spectacular event which preceded the outbreak of the Civil War. A man called John Brown, with a good deal of fighting experience behind him, and a passion for the abolition of slavery urging him on, collected a few abolitionists and a few negroes and seized the United States arsenal at Harper's Ferry in Virginia, with the aim of causing a rising of the slaves and their freedom. The Federal troops got him cornered in the arsenal and, after a desperate defence, he was captured. The troops were under the command of a Colonel Robert E. Lee, and there was also present a Captain Jackson.

John Brown was given a perfectly fair trial and condemned to death. There were of course two extreme views about John



Brown's exploit. The officer in command of the troops at his execution exclaimed: 'So perish all foes of the human race!' The North regarded him as a hero. Brown himself took a much more measured view. He did not dispute the correctness of his sentence, but he was also certain that he had been right in doing what he did. He thought that the slave-owners were 'guilty of a great wrong against God and humanity', and, further, he saw quite clearly that the whole question had to be fought out. Speaking shortly before he died, he is reported to have said:

'I wish to say furthermore that you had better—all you people of the South—prepare yourselves for a settlement of this question, that must come up for settlement sooner than you are prepared for it. You may dispose of me very easily. I am nearly disposed of now. But this question is still to be settled—this negro question I mean. The end of that is not yet.'

Many of those who most warmly admire him have been surprised and even shocked by Lincoln's attitude towards John Brown. I think that both the surprise and the shock are needless, and am also quite sure that unless one understands Lincoln's attitude about this one never begins to understand Lincoln. John Brown was beyond any kind of doubt utterly sincere and utterly fearless. He saw something that he hated and thought was wrong, and he proposed to hit it as hard as he could and in the most direct way he could think of. He was a fanatic, and a fanatic can be a very splendid person; but he is almost invariably short-sighted. His actions may appeal to the heart, and stir the blood, but they often do not appeal to the head. And there was no doubt that John Brown's action was illegal. Lincoln was a lawyer, and he was a man who took long views. He never believed in pursuing the right end by the wrong means. To say that illegal action could be right, whatever its end, would have seemed to him treason to all that he valued. His attitude of disapproval to John Brown's exploit

seems to many people cold-blooded, unsympathetic, and contradictory to his own statements about his hatred of slavery. But he thought, rightly or wrongly, that lawlessness and the approval of lawless action were worse evils even than slavery. And anyone who is disappointed that Lincoln did not enthusiastically approve of this direct challenge, by illegal force of arms, to the slavery which he detested, is simply wanting Lincoln to be a different kind of man from what Lincoln was.

In 1860 the strong movement was beginning which in the end put Lincoln forward as the Republican candidate for the Presidency and took him to the White House. His supporters knew that, at an early and most important stage in their campaign, Lincoln, the comparatively unknown lawyer from the Middle West, hitherto important only in Middle Western politics, must be introduced to the East, and in particular to New York. Therefore in February of 1860 he appeared in the Cooper Institute in New York before an audience by far more critical than any he had yet faced, including many people who were inclined to look down on him, some from the heights of superior intellect or education, others from the heights of social position.

The occasion was a turning-point in Lincoln's career. He knew he was on trial, and he probably knew the kind of thing which his audience expected, an exhibition of forcible oratory, rather over-coloured, from an untutored product of the still half-civilized (as New York thought) Middle West. The audience got something which it did not expect at all. The speaker began, as he almost always did, awkwardly and rather shyly, and it is clear that some who were listening thought at first that he was going to be a complete failure. Even when he gained confidence he was very quiet. He said nothing new, but he said what he had said before with a sincerity so complete



that his audience was profoundly moved. And they were moved also by something beyond the sincerity of the speaker; that was his curious aloofness from them. He was not trying to impress them with himself. He was trying to impress them with the truth of what he had to say. When the speech was over it was far from certain that Lincoln would be the Republican candidate for the Presidency, but it was quite certain that he was a man who had to be reckoned with as a possible candidate.

When the Republican Convention met, they knew the Democratic vote was so split that no Democratic candidate had a chance of election so long as they, the Republicans, could put up a candidate who would not also split the Republican vote. That is, if they chose right, the election of a Republican was as certain as anything in politics can be. There were several candidates much superior to Lincoln in all kinds of ways, in reputation, in education, in social standing, notably Seward of New York and Chase of Ohio. But for various reasons they were not—to use the convenient American expression—so ‘available’ as Lincoln: that is to say, they were more likely to split the vote.

The meeting of a Convention of one of the great American parties to nominate a candidate for the Presidency is a rather curious performance. Delegates arrive, representing the particular party, from all the States, and a number of speeches are made, and a number of candidates are proposed. One or two of these candidates are from the outset serious candidates. Others are what is known as ‘favourite sons’: that is to say, they are put forward by the delegation of their own State as a kind of compliment, and it is understood that their names will later be withdrawn and the votes of the delegation transferred elsewhere. A candidate is not finally nominated until he has a clear majority, and the balloting goes on, with transfers of votes on each ballot, till this majority is secured. As a result, it sometimes takes days, with intervening nights of wire-pulling,



to get any candidate nominated at all. On this occasion proceedings were more rapid. There were 465 delegates, so that 233 votes were needed for nomination. On the first ballot Seward had 173 and Lincoln 102, the remaining votes being widely distributed. On the second ballot Lincoln and Seward were almost equal, 181 and 184, and on the third ballot, when the run of the tide was beginning to be clear, Lincoln went to 231 against Seward's 180. The Ohio delegation then transferred four votes to Lincoln and he was nominated as the Republican candidate for the Presidency. Lincoln was in Springfield when the news arrived. He got a telegram from the man who had been the chief worker for him which read as follows: 'We did it. Glory to God.' He was sitting in the office of the local paper, and his first comment was that he was going home to tell his wife. 'There is a lady over yonder on Eighth Street who is deeply interested in this news; I will carry it to her.'

The nomination over, all efforts were concentrated on the actual campaign of Republicans against Democrats for the Presidency. There is no need to go into any details of this, but Seward's behaviour deserves a very honourable mention. He was very naturally deeply disappointed by the fact that the nomination, which in many ways he had every reason to expect, had not come his way. But he put all personal disappointment behind him and put every ounce of power he had in him into campaigning for his successful rival. He knew, now and always, that in many ways he was Lincoln's superior, but, apart from one short episode, for the next five years he gave Lincoln, and through Lincoln his country, everything he had to give, in the way of advice and experience, with the most complete loyalty. Seward, I think, had one of the marks of the really great man: he could recognize and admire and serve a kind of greatness different from his own, as Chase, for example, just as able but a meaner man, could not.



# 6

## MARKING TIME

On 6th November, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States. On 12th April, 1861, a gun was fired against Fort Sumter, and the Civil War had begun. Between those two dates lie five months in which, though the main events are clear enough, there is much that seems confused and difficult to grasp. In particular it seems for part of the time not at all easy to understand what line Lincoln was taking. Was he just a man who suddenly found himself faced with a job too big for him? Or was he being very wise? Or was he simply being hampered by a peculiarity of the American constitution? If he had taken a more decisive line, could he have averted the Civil War? And so on, and so on. If we are to make for ourselves any picture of Lincoln, we have to try to answer those questions.

First, then, let us get clear the main events. Lincoln was elected on 6th November. It was known that the election of a Republican President, and particularly Lincoln, would make at any rate a good deal of the South furious. On 20th December South Carolina, always the most restive State, formally seceded, but this did not in itself mean that civil war was

inevitable. There was still a good deal of strong pro-Union feeling in many of the Southern States, and many of the leading men and the best thinkers were opposed to the action of South Carolina. But some of the States were slowly swung over, more by emotion than by thought, and on 8th February, at Montgomery, Alabama, delegates from seven States met and announced the formation of the 'Confederate States of America'. These States were Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and the ring-leader, South Carolina.

The delegates elected Jefferson Davis, of South Carolina, President, and A. H. Stephens, of Georgia, Vice-President. Those two elections are important in themselves, since they determined the political leadership of the South for the critical years ahead; but they are also important because they show us something of the way in which people's minds were working in those confused and troubled days that came before the war. One would have rather expected that if seven States met with the deliberate purpose of breaking away from the Union, and setting themselves up as an independent confederacy, they would elect for their chief executive officers men who were strongly in favour of the policy of secession. But they did nothing of the sort. And one would have rather expected that men who were not in favour of secession would have refused to take positions in which their duty was to be the leading of a group of seceded States. Again these men did nothing of the sort. Davis was anxious to do nothing precipitate and to give the Lincoln administration a chance. He was politician enough to realize that Lincoln's difficulties were going to be extreme, and that the South might get what it wanted by peaceful means. Stephens had fought with all his energy to prevent Georgia seceding. And yet these anti-secessionists were elected by the seceding States, and, because they felt that they were the servants of their States, they accepted office, knowing that



they would have to move flat against their convictions. The remaining four States which in the end completed the eleven Confederate States did not join the Confederacy till after the outbreak of war, though they had voted in favour of secession earlier.

Lincoln was inaugurated on 4th March, 1861, and the war began on 12th April.

It is one of the peculiarities, and sometimes a most inconvenient peculiarity, of the American constitution that a new President, elected in November, does not take office till some time later.<sup>1</sup> In the interval he has no executive power. In ordinary times this matters little. He can spend his time forming his cabinet, dealing with a crowd of office-hunters, some of whom have to be rewarded for their efforts during the Presidential campaign, working out his policy and probably making a few speeches. But in a time of crisis it matters a great deal, not only from the point of view of the incoming President, but because of what the outgoing President may, during those months, do or not do. He may take action that will embarrass his successor; or he may be so afraid of doing this that he will fail to do things that badly need to be done.

These four months, from November, 1860, to March, 1861, are, in the whole of Lincoln's life, the most puzzling and, for the admirer of Lincoln, the least satisfactory. Apart from the routine business of forming his cabinet and handing out offices, he did, so far as the main crisis went, as nearly as might be, exactly nothing; and this at a time when decisive action seems, on the face of it, to have been urgently called for. Many even of his admirers feel that he cut a poor figure, and those who admire him less say that if only he had been more definite he could have rallied the pro-Union feeling in the South and averted the Civil War.

That the war could have been averted for the moment on

<sup>1</sup> In Lincoln's time, March; since 1933, January.

*some* terms no one denied then or denies now. And some people argue that if it could have been averted for the moment slavery would have died a natural death and that the war would never have been necessary. Whether one thinks that argument sound depends on whether one thinks that the South seceded to preserve slavery or used slavery as a stimulus for secession—whether, in fact, one is or is not of Andrew Jackson's opinion. But whether the war could have been averted even for the moment on any terms that Lincoln could have accepted is extremely doubtful. He had made his position perfectly plain, and, which is the important point, it was in virtue of that position, so stated, that he had been elected President. Any withdrawal from that position would have been a betrayal of those who had elected him. But I think that it is just possible that if he had acted differently he might have prevented one or more of the doubtful States from joining the Confederacy. And in any case his inaction looks as though it came from weakness and indecision. Buchanan, the outgoing President, was a weak man and a tired man; the air was full of sincere suggestions for compromise that came to nothing. Surely Lincoln could have done something about it, have given some guidance, some leadership, instead of just watching things drifting steadily nearer and nearer to final disaster?

The feeling is very natural but, I think, only partly justified. When we feel like that, we are, I believe, not looking at the situation as a whole, not reckoning with all the factors in it. And by the situation as a whole I mean not only the circumstances of the time, the political cross-currents and shifting winds, but also the make-up of the man who found himself trying to steer his own course and his country's among those winds and currents.

Let me, then, try to give you the picture of Lincoln as I see him in the winter of 1860-1, between the time when he was elected President and the time he took office. It is, as I said at



the beginning of this book, only one person's picture, but I think that any sort of picture is better than a blank screen, which has on it a date or two and the statement that Lincoln did little or nothing.

In the first place, I do not think that Lincoln was yet within distance of being the great man that he later became, and those of his admirers do him very poor service who try to show that he was. Incidentally they make the study of his life far less exciting than in fact it is. Lincoln was always first-rate metal, but he was one of those men who need to be hammered, and hammered hard, on the anvil of events before they are properly tempered and shaped. The Lincoln who delivered the great Second Inaugural in 1865 was a very different man from the Lincoln who delivered the well-considered, clear, and balanced Inaugural of 1861, and almost beyond recognition a greater man. He knew beyond question in 1865 that he was a great leader—he had always a clear eye for facts and not even his profound and genuine humility could blind him to them. He had stood at the helm of a rather crank craft for four very stormy years; he had been beaten upon by tempests of derision and abuse; he had had to deal with something like mutiny among his crew and with dangerous ambition and disaffection among his subordinate officers; from all his trials he had learned how to set a course and hold it, and at last the ship was beating up for harbour.

That was Lincoln in 1865. But what was he in 1860? He was a man who had risen from the humblest beginnings to be a competent Middle-Western lawyer; he had been fighting for a bare living for as long as he could remember; such education as he had he had managed to get by sheer dogged determination; he had been a not very distinguished member of Congress, and been later defeated by Douglas for the senatorship; he was well practised in local and state politics, but very little practised in anything outside them; on the credit side he had gained a vast



deal of practical wisdom by contact with all sorts and kinds of men, a wisdom which might, in some circumstances, be far more valuable than book-learning; he was dead honest, and he had a most penetrating eye for the things that really mattered in any problem that confronted him. He had no illusions about himself. His mind moved slowly, but surely. He would ask for, and listen to, advice from anyone whose opinion he respected. He would use the advice to help him in making up his own mind about the situation, but when he had made up his own mind he was inflexible. He was completely courageous.

I think that at this point it is worth giving you Lincoln's own account of himself at this time, as he stands at the great turning-point of his life. I know that it is little more than a summary of what you have already read, but it is Lincoln's own summary, and you may as well have it from him as from me. He had been asked for some account of himself and his early life, and he wrote this:

'I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families. . . . My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky, about 1781 or 1782, where a year or two later he was killed by the Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was labouring to open a farm in the forest. . . . My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin', and cipherin'" to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighbourhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon



this store of education I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

'I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, Macon County. Then I got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard County, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store.

'Then came the Black Hawk War; and I was elected a captain of volunteers, a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went the campaign, was elated,<sup>1</sup> ran for the legislature the same year, and was beaten—the only time I ever have been beaten by the people. The next and three succeeding biennial elections I was elected to the legislature. I was not a candidate afterward. During this legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield to practise it. In 1846 I was once elected to the lower House of Congress. Was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849 to 1854, both inclusive, practised law more assiduously than ever before. . . . I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again. What I have done since is pretty well known.

'If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said I am, in height, six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing on an average one hundred and eighty pounds (12 st. 12 lb.); dark complexion, with coarse black hair and grey eyes. No other marks or brands recollected.'

I do not think that I am particularly fanciful or particularly sentimental, but that letter always seems to me, out of the mass of Lincoln's speeches and letters that we have ready for our examination, one of the most moving and most illuminating documents. I suggest that you read it several times, and get the 'feel' of it for yourselves. I will suggest only one or two points about it. Lincoln is neither ashamed of, nor proud of, his humble ancestry; that is just a fact. Notice Lincoln's lawyer's accuracy, both about places and about personal details—in particular the words 'nearly' and 'on the average'. Notice the reference to the people. Why for those five years did he practise law more assiduously? And notice in particular

<sup>1</sup> All the texts of this document which I have seen give this almost meaningless word. I think Lincoln must have written 'slated'—i.e. 'nominated as candidate'.

that at one time he was losing interest in politics; it was not personal ambition that revived his interest.

Anyway, there was the man who in 1860 suddenly found himself unexpectedly put by 'the people' in a position where he had to face a crisis and shoulder a burden more acute and heavier, as he knew and said, than even George Washington had had to face and shoulder. And I think that at any rate part of the reason for Lincoln's failure to grasp the nettle more firmly is the quite simple one that he was for the time being overwhelmed by the sheer size of his job and perhaps bewildered by its complexity. Only a man of wider experience, and also, I think, only a much more arrogant man, would not have been at least partly overwhelmed and bewildered. Add to this Lincoln's strong sense of being an elected representative of the people, a sense so strong that he was acutely anxious to do nothing that might seem going beyond the authority he had been given. He had not yet learned that a man may sometimes be most truly representative of his people when he is giving them a decisive lead, making them suddenly realize what their real wishes are, instead of waiting to be pushed by them from behind. He was still at the stage of waiting, not perhaps for the impulse, since he was sure enough of what ought to be done, but at least of waiting till he was sure that he was not going too far ahead. And there may even have been a little of the ostrich about it, of hoping that if he didn't look too hard at the crisis, by the time he arrived where he had to look at it it might have become less menacing.

Just what was going on in Lincoln's mind it is no doubt very difficult to guess, but these few months are so important in his career that we ought to make some attempt at guessing, and at the risk of being tiresome and repeating myself, I want to stress again the *unexpectedness* of the position in which Lincoln found himself. It is difficult to draw any parallel picture from our own politics, which work so differently, and in which a



man could hardly arrive at being Prime Minister without years of experience not only of politics but of national as opposed to local politics. It is a little as though a man who was a respected citizen of one of our towns had stood as a candidate for Parliament at a time of crisis, and, though defeated, had made speeches which were widely reported and discussed and so had become something of a national figure, and then (this is what with us could not happen) had suddenly become Prime Minister, with powers in some ways far beyond any that our Prime Minister can exercise.

But however far one explains Lincoln's apparent lack of decision by his consciousness of his own inexperience, there is one quite different factor in the situation which is often neglected, a factor which might well have affected a man of far wider experience who had expected to be President and had been preparing himself for the task for years. This is the quite plain, blunt fact that during the winter of 1860-1 Lincoln was only President-elect, not President. The peculiarity of the Constitution mentioned earlier in this chapter puts any President, whatever his ability, whatever his experience, in a kind of false position. His country has given him a job to do, and then he is prevented from doing it. For four months after his election Lincoln, as President-elect, had exactly no executive power; it was not that he had little, or that it was hampered; he had none. And things were moving fast. What was the good of his saying in, say, December, 1860, what ought to be done? It was not to be expected that Buchanan would do his job for him, and by March 1861, Lincoln might have been dead or things might have moved so fast and so far that what was right in December would have been wildly wrong three months later. By a premature statement of his proposed detailed course of action—his general principles were already inescapably clear to anyone who could read print—he might only have played into the hands of his opponents. And of



all men Lincoln was the last to make promises until he had the power to fulfil them. I think, therefore, that during these months Lincoln was, inevitably, playing for time, as anyone might wisely have done, and also was taking refuge from a sense of the overwhelmingness of his position by concentrating on what one may call the routine job of cabinet-making, which any President-elect had to undertake, crisis or no crisis.

Cabinet-making was at any rate a job which had to be done, and Lincoln got on with it. His choices are interesting. In the first place, it was desirable that the offices in the cabinet should be as widely as possible distributed among States, not only because it would please the States concerned, but because it was important that he should have first-hand information about the temper of various States. In the second place, he wanted to collect round him, in view of the daily more imminent crisis, the men with the most wisdom and the most administrative experience and energy that he could lay his hands on. Their wisdom and energy would do no more than supplement his own; but their experience was badly needed to counterbalance his own lack of it, of which he was just as honestly aware. And he showed straight away that he had one of the qualities of a great man—he was not afraid to surround himself with first-rate subordinates, even when they were superior to himself in some things, and even when it seemed on the face of it unlikely that they could work harmoniously in one team with one another. He trusted himself to get out of them the best that there was in them, without allowing any of them to usurp his own power, and also to be able to inspire them with a common devotion to their common aim which would override their private differences.

The two outstanding men in the cabinet were Seward of New York and Chase of Ohio, the second of whom had been for a time a serious, and the first till the end by far the most



dangerous, among Lincoln's rivals for the Republican nomination. The two men are an interesting contrast. Put in very simple terms, one did, and one did not, know how to accept defeat like a gentleman and a loyal servant of his nation. Seward became Secretary of State (in our terms roughly Foreign Minister), and with one brief lapse, to which we shall return, he served with complete loyalty, devotion and ability. He was a man of first-rate talents, quicker-witted than Lincoln, and with far wider experience of affairs. But he had the brains to know, and—which is not at all the same thing—the generosity and sincerity to admit to himself that he knew, that Lincoln had something which he himself had not, so that Lincoln was in the right place as President and he as Secretary of State.

Chase, too, was an able man; he was also, I think, a mean man, and a jealous one. He never could quit feeling that he ought to have been President, and would at any moment make a better one than Lincoln. You may have read John Drinkwater's play *Abraham Lincoln*. I have never understood why he thought it necessary to introduce a quite mythical figure, whom he calls Burnet Hook, as the disloyal member of the cabinet when Chase was sitting there all ready to his hand. Chase was Secretary of the Treasury.

Cameron of Pennsylvania became Secretary of War. He had been promised a post in the cabinet (against Lincoln's express instructions that *no* promises were to be made in his name) by those who were working for Lincoln at the Republican convention. He was not a success and was before long replaced by Stanton. Bates, a good sound man from Missouri—a 'border State' and therefore important—became Attorney-General. Smith of Indiana (Middle West) was Secretary of the Interior, Welles of Connecticut (New England) was Secretary of the Navy, and Blair of Maryland (a State doubtfully loyal) Postmaster-General.

On 11th February, 1861, with his cabinet formed, Lincoln left Springfield to make his way towards Washington for his inauguration three weeks later. Standing on a platform at the end of the train, he spoke to the friends who had come to say good-bye. 'My friends, no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him, who can go with me and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To his care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.'

It was a characteristic Lincoln speech. There is no pride, and no false modesty. He realizes the weight of the burden laid on his shoulders. If God could have found a pair of shoulders better calculated to bear the weight he would presumably have chosen them. As he hasn't, Lincoln, under God, must do the best he can. He never saw Springfield again. There he was, the plain, homely Middle-Western, self-educated lawyer, setting his face towards Washington, and towards four years of toil and sorrow, that ended with sudden death in the hour of final achievement; and he was saying good-bye to the friends of his small Middle-Western home town.

On his way to Washington Lincoln delivered a series of speeches, at Indianapolis, Indiana, at Columbus, Ohio, at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at Trenton, New Jersey, and at Philadelphia. It is these speeches which have come under



such a heavy fire of criticism—criticism based, as I think and have tried to show, on misunderstanding of Lincoln's position and views.

In his first speech he made no pronouncement. But he proposed a series of telling questions, and he ended by saying, 'Fellow-citizens, I am not asserting anything. I am merely asking questions for you to consider.' In his second speech he showed that he was aware that his silence had been criticized, and he went the length of explaining why he had been silent so long and why he said so little now. 'Allusion has been made to the interest felt in regard to the policy of the new Administration. In this I have received from some a degree of credit for having kept silence, and from others some deprecation. I still think I was right. In the varying and repeatedly shifting scenes of the present, and without a precedent which could enable me to judge by the past, it has seemed fitting that before speaking upon the difficulties of the country, I should have gained a view of the whole field, being at liberty to modify and change the course of policy as future events may make a change necessary.'

So far, so good; and his own view of what he could properly do before his actual inauguration could hardly have been better put. What followed was hardly so happy. It was criticized then, and has been criticized since, as the attitude of the ostrich, that won't see because it does not want to. He said: 'I have not maintained silence from any want of real anxiety. It is a good thing that there is no more than anxiety, for there is nothing going wrong. It is a consoling circumstance that when we look out, there is nothing that really hurts anybody. We entertain different views upon political questions, but nobody is suffering anything.'

This, not unnaturally, roused a storm, and I suspect that after it Lincoln's stock was lower than at almost any other time in his career. No admirer of Lincoln, however sincere,

can help wishing that he had not said that. The comment of the *New York Herald* was temperate and not unjust. 'If Mr. Lincoln has nothing better to offer upon this fearful crisis than the foolish consolations of his speech in Columbus, let him say nothing at all.' The crisis *was* a fearful one, and Lincoln knew it as well as anyone, and it was certainly not to be handled by appearing to pretend that it did not exist. Of all Lincoln's utterances this was the most maladroit. It made his supporters feel that he had no sense of the facts, and it insulted the South by saying in effect that they were making a fuss about nothing.

But by the time he got to New Jersey, after a sincerely modest speech in New York, he had pulled himself together. He explained why he was saying little, because soon he would be able to speak officially. Then he said something very different from what he had said at Columbus, something that made his audience break out into applause so loud that he could not get on with his speech. 'The man does not live who is more devoted to peace than I am, none who would do more to preserve it, but it may be necessary to put the foot down firmly.' Then came a remark so characteristic of him, with his reliance on the support from the people without which a man elected by the people could not work. 'If I do my duty and do right, you will sustain me, will you not?' And then finally a sentence which showed how untrue was the idea that he did not, in his heart, know just how grave the crisis was; he knew that he might be the last President of the United States of America. 'If the ship of state should suffer wreck now, there will be no pilot ever needed for another voyage.'

Then he went on to Philadelphia, and somehow, as he got nearer to Washington and to the day of his inauguration, he seemed to begin to be more and more the President, knowing his own mind, less and less the country lawyer, bewildered by



his high station. He went back, as was his way, to the Declaration of Independence. If the country could be saved on the principles put forward in that Declaration, he would consider himself one of the happiest men in the world if he could help to save it. 'If it cannot be saved upon that principle it will be truly awful. But'—one of his best 'buts'—'if it cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say I would rather be assassinated on the spot than surrender it.' The man who said that knew well enough that there was a crisis and that he was prepared to meet it. And he went on: 'The Government will not use force unless force is used against it', with the clear implication that if force *was* used against it the Government would also use force. He ended with a few sentences which are so like him that they need to be given in full. He thought, in his modest way, that all they wanted him for was to pull up a flag over Independence Hall; and he was afraid that he might, on the spur of the moment, have said, not indeed more than he felt, but more than at the moment he felt wise. 'My friends, this is wholly an unprepared speech. I supposed that I was merely to do something towards raising a flag.' (That seems to me a real masterpiece of understatement, that the President-elect of a great country should be merely 'doing something towards' anything—but it was quite honest.) 'I may, therefore, have said something indiscreet.' (His audience greeted this with cries of 'No', but he knew what difficult course of silence or half-utterance he had plotted for himself, and was afraid that he had deviated from it.) 'But I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and, if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, to die by.'

The remark about assassination must have rung oddly on the ears of his Philadelphia audience, but there was a good reason for it. The night before his speech, Pinkerton, the head of the famous American detective agency, brought news that there was a plot to assassinate Lincoln as he went through

Baltimore a day or two later. Pinkerton and other advisers were anxious that Lincoln should not keep his engagement to speak at Baltimore, but go through the city at night and in advance of his scheduled time, so as to arrive safely in Washington. Lincoln cross-examined Pinkerton closely about his evidence for the plot, and it seemed to hold water. Then he said that he had two engagements, one to raise the flag at Independence Hall the next day, and after that to speak at Harrisburg. Those two engagements he was going to keep whatever happened. Then he would consider any plan that was proposed. Later that same night there arrived from Washington Seward's son, with messages from his father, giving news of the same plot, but received from different sources, and urging Lincoln to go through Baltimore by night. Lincoln cross-examined young Seward as closely as he had Pinkerton, aiming to find out whether this was no more than a repetition of what he had heard already, or whether it was fresh evidence, and he said something which might be a motto for anyone who is trying to find out whether a rumour has a solid foundation; it is a point which is very obvious but very often forgotten. He particularly asked young Seward whether he had heard his father mention Pinkerton, and Seward said no. 'This,' said Lincoln, 'is why I am asking you about names. If different persons, not knowing of each other's work, have been pursuing separate clues that led to the same result, why, then, it shows that there may be something in it. But if this is only the same story, filtered through two channels, and reaching me in two ways, then that don't make it any stronger. Don't you see?' Quite unanswerable; but so many people think that a rumour is more likely to be true the oftener it is repeated.

In the end Lincoln consented to do what his advisers wanted. He didn't like it, and he knew that he would be jeered at. He was perfectly courageous, and if any useful purpose would



have been served by his keeping to his original programme, he would have done so. But his plain duty was to get safely inaugurated and begin on his important work; and besides, the assassination, or even the attempted assassination, of the President-elect would have inflamed beyond all hope of control feelings which were already running dangerously high. So he gave his speech at Harrisburg, and left early in the evening, his departure being almost unnoticed. His train went through Baltimore in the night, and he arrived in Washington on 23rd February, earlier, of course, than had been expected, and with nine days to wait for his inauguration.

Since the 4th of February there had been meeting in Washington a group known as a 'Peace Convention' to which twenty-one of the border and northern States had sent delegates. It represented many shades of opinion, particularly the opinions of 'big business', which wanted peace at any price and cared very little about the Union except in so far as it smoothed the way for big business. Its proceedings are therefore interesting to the historian, but so far as its effect on the 'march of events' was concerned it might as well never have met. It suddenly occurred to one of the delegates that as the President-elect had arrived in Washington, and he might perhaps have something to do with the way in which things would fall out, it might be as well to see him. So they took an evening off from their idle speechifying and went to the hotel at which Lincoln was staying.

His dealings with them make interesting reading, though they are too long to give here. He answered every question quite plainly, quite honestly, and when he thought it necessary—as when one or two delegates made statements that were plain lies—very bluntly. But one interchange must be given. A delegate from New York, one of the 'big-businessers', said: 'It is for you to say whether the whole nation shall be plunged into bankruptcy, whether the grass shall grow in the streets of



our commercial cities.' That, being quite vague, was an easy one, and Lincoln answered it with a smile. 'If it depends on me, the grass shall not grow anywhere except in the fields and the meadows.' 'Then,' said the delegate, 'you will yield to the just demands of the South. You will not go to war on account of slavery!' That was no longer vague, and Lincoln was no longer amused. He replied very quietly and deliberately. 'I do not know that I understand your meaning. Nor do I know what my acts and opinions may be in the future, beyond this. If I shall ever come to the great office of President of the United States, I shall take an oath. I shall swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, of all the United States, and that I will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. This is a great and solemn duty. With the support of the people and the assistance of the Almighty I shall undertake to perform it. I have full faith that I shall perform it. It is not the Constitution as I would like to have it, but as it *is*, that is to be preserved and defended until it is enforced and obeyed in every one of the United States. It must be so respected, obeyed, enforced and defended, let the grass grow where it may.' The delegate from New York had perhaps the sense to realize that he had run his head against something hard. A delegate from Virginia at any rate, as they went away, made a comment which did him credit. 'He is probably not so great a statesman as Mr. Madison, he may not have the will power of General Jackson. He may combine the qualities of both. *He will be the head of his administration, and he will do his own thinking.*' Mr. Rives of Virginia was a man of insight. One side at least of Lincoln's Presidency could hardly be better summarized.

On 4th March Lincoln was inaugurated. He was, no doubt to his inward if well-concealed exasperation and discomfort, all dressed up for the occasion, with the most unbecoming



beard which he had lately grown, and with a new (for once) top-hat, and an ebony stick with an immense gold head. Seeing him embarrassed by these, his old rival, Douglas, with a pleasant gesture, relieved him of them when he looked round for somewhere to put them when he came to deliver his 'First Inaugural', when, that is, just before taking the oath, he could, on the verge of becoming President, break the silence he had imposed on himself.

This First Inaugural is not Lincoln's most famous speech. For different, and quite sound, reasons, the Gettysburg speech and the Second Inaugural are better known and more quoted. But both those were, in a way, easier. The first was on a great occasion, which might have inspired anybody, but it was also an episode. If he put a word wrong it did little harm to anyone but himself. For the second, he was sure of himself. He had guided the state through four grievous years, and the state had shown that it wanted him to continue to guide it to the end of its travail, and that end was in sight. But I am not sure that, if we remember the circumstances, we shall not rightly think that of all his speeches the First Inaugural was the greatest. Certainly few great men have ever done anything so difficult so well.

I said 'if we remember the circumstances', and we ought to remember them. It is so easy, and so deceptive, to throw back on to that platform on the Capitol in 1861 the figure of the great war-tried President of 1865, tested, shaped, and above all developed, by his four years of office. Let us try to use some sort of historical imagination and (what is sometimes the same thing) some sort of human sympathy and understanding of men, and so try to realize what that hour must have meant to Lincoln. Here he was, the untried country lawyer from Illinois, called to the highest office in his country, and called to it at a crisis the gravest in its history. He was wise about men, and, experienced in local politics. He was quite sure of his own

honesty of purpose, and very sure indeed about the principles that were to guide his policy, but he was equally sure of his inexperience of great affairs, the sort of experience that would help him to know how in detail those principles were to be carried into effect. The South hated him, and his own supporters in the North were very far from sure of him. His aim was to save the Union, without war if it might be, with war if it had to be. He was to make a speech that would make plain to all in his own country, and to the world, what the policy of his administration was to be. He must not antagonize the South beyond the hope of a peaceful settlement. He must also make it plain that there were some things on which he would not yield an inch. And, without antagonizing the South, he must also make it plain to the North that if it came to fighting they were fighting for something worth fighting for. He had worked over it and over it; he had asked for advice about it, and sometimes taken the advice, not always, I think, wisely. But it was he, alone, who had to deliver it, and once delivered it could never be called back or altered, and it would go far to determine the future of his country. I think that most of us, unless we were very conceited, which Lincoln was not, might have felt a trifle shaky about the knees if we had had to deliver that speech of 4th March, 1861.

It was a great speech, but it was also a dry speech, and I think that if I quoted it in full many of you would be a little parched before you got to the end, though I hope that later many of you will read it, and read it again, and 'inwardly digest' it, for it is full of wisdom. For the moment I will only give the heads of it.

1. Straight away he met the feeling of the South that by the accession of a Republican administration their 'property, peace, and personal security would be endangered'. He quoted from one of his own speeches: 'I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the



States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.'

2. He dealt with the fugitive slave law, and pointed out that it was as firmly a part of the constitution as any other part. He put in a typical remark about the dispute whether the surrender of a fugitive slave should be enforced by national or State authority. 'If the slave is to be surrendered, it can be of but little consequence to him, or to others, by which authority it is done.'

3. 'A disruption of the Federal Union, heretofore only menaced, is now formidably attempted.' He argued that the Union was, by its constitution, unbreakable by *part* of itself. 'One party to a contract may violate it, but does it not require all to lawfully rescind it?' That is to say, no State can *lawfully* get out of the Union, and acts of violence against the authority of the United States are insurrectionary or revolutionary.

4. A notable and closely reasoned passage about the great democratic principle of 'majority rule'. If a majority by mere force of numbers were to try to deprive a minority of a vital right secured to it under the constitution, that would justify revolution, But no vital right was at the moment threatened—i.e. it could not by any sensible man be regarded as a vital right of the Southern States to *extend* slavery, so long as the institution was secured within their own borders. In all other circumstances the minority must acquiesce, or democratic government becomes impossible. And if a minority secedes rather than acquiesce, they do no more than set up an example for discontented portions of themselves to secede later. The minority may, of course, try to convert itself into a majority, and secure its ends by legislation, but apart from that, 'rejecting the majority principle, anarchy or despotism in some form is all that is left'.

5. Very practical brass tacks. 'Physically speaking, we cannot separate.' There were the States, part of one country,

of a geographical whole. For all purposes of ordinary life, business and so on, they were, whether they liked it or not, next door to one another. 'Intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them. Is it possible to make that intercourse more advantageous or more satisfactory after separation than before?'

6. On the same very practical and wise lines, a word or two about war. 'Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always; and when, after much loss on both sides, and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions as to terms of intercourse are again upon you.'

7. 'The country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it.' These people can, by peaceful and constitutional means, without going to war, amend their constitution. But, and a very important but, it is the people as a whole, *and they only*, who can do so. The President, who derives his authority from them, cannot do it without an alteration of that authority. 'His duty is to administer the *present* government, as it came to his hands, and to transmit it, unimpaired by him, to his successor.'

8. A wise plea for taking time, and not doing anything rash in a hurry. He pointed out that 'the people have wisely given their public servants but little power for mischief; and have, with equal wisdom, provided for the return of that little to their own hands at very short intervals'. Hence 'no administration by any extreme of wickedness or folly, can very seriously injure the government in the short space of four years'. (This paragraph, though true enough if one pays exact attention to the words used, is perhaps not quite as honest as Lincoln's words usually were. It was easy to read it, and I fancy that Lincoln hoped that it might be read, as at least implying something other than what it said. He was desperately anxious to prevent the South being scared, or stampeded into war because he, Lincoln, with his well-known views, had been



elected President. And to a casual reader it might seem that he was saying, 'No President, after all, can do much damage in four years'. What he did in fact say was that no President could do much damage *to the government*, i.e. to the fabric of the constitution, in four years; and that was entirely true. But it was not true at all that any President might not by his actions plunge the country into turmoil and bloodshed from which it would take long years to recover, however firm the constitution remained.)

9. The last two paragraphs I want to give you in full, partly just because they are the conclusion of a great speech, and a speech of first-rate historical importance, partly because of some alterations which Lincoln consented to make in what he had originally written.

'In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. *You* have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while *I* shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it".'

That much stayed as he wrote it, and was so delivered, but Lincoln had then written two short sentences (indeed they got the length of being printed and were deleted only in proof) which stated the same thing even more shortly. 'You can forbear the assault upon it; I cannot shrink from the defence of it. With you, and not with me, is the solemn question of "Shall it be peace, or a sword?"' Those were to have been Lincoln's last words to the South, and they seem to me to be Lincoln at his best, grave, simple, direct, and exactly in key with the rest of his speech. But Lincoln had all along been very ready to accept suggestions about his speech from a variety of advisers, particularly Seward. Some of the suggestions had been excellent and saved Lincoln from some tactical blunders; others had aimed merely at transposing some of Lincoln's

characteristic and forceful plainness of speech into something which was thought to be 'more dignified'. Seward thought this ending too warlike, so Lincoln dropped it, and Seward further urged that the speech should close with 'some words of affection, some of calm and cheerful confidence'. Since the speech, for all its moderation of tone, never attempted to disguise the gravity of the situation, and was quite uncompromising, what earthly good Seward thought would be done by some 'words of calm and cheerful confidence' was best known to Seward; but anyway, he tried his hand at them, and he produced the following:

'I close. We are not, we must not be, aliens or enemies, but fellow-countrymen and brethren. Although passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly, they must not, I am sure they will not, be broken, The mystic chords which, proceeding from so many battlefields and so many patriot graves, pass through all the hearts and all the hearths in this broad continent of ours, will yet again harmonize in their ancient music when breathed upon by the guardian angel of the nation.'

For all his readiness to take advice, this verbiage was more than Lincoln could swallow, and he knew perfectly well that he could never deliver it with any conviction. So he did his best with it and produced this, which is the close of his speech as he gave it:

'I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.'

Well, that was better; it at least meant something, and it was to some extent like Lincoln, but it was an earlier Lincoln, the



Lincoln who had admired the flowery periods of Websterian oratory. It was not at all the Lincoln of the First Inaugural, and worst of all it was hopelessly out of tune with the rest of the speech. The speech had been deliberately dry, the speech of a lawyer, even more the speech of a great judge, dispassionate, unemotional, putting forward the facts, challenging calm thought and never rousing emotion. And Lincoln had given it a fit ending. Now it faded out in a cloudy appeal to the emotions.

When the speech ended, old Chief Justice Taney, who had already sworn in eight Presidents, came forward and held out to Lincoln the Bible on which he took the oath, in the constitutional formula, 'I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.'

From that moment Lincoln was President, and the decks were cleared for action.

# 7

## THE CIVIL WAR—ISSUES AND STRATEGY

The immediate storm-centre was Fort Sumter, in the harbour of Charleston, South Carolina. This was a fort under the control, as were all such forts, of the Federal Government, and garrisoned by a Federal garrison, under the command of Major Robert Anderson. The South was trying to starve it out, so that the fort would be evacuated and the control of the Federal Government abandoned, without such an obvious act of war as firing a shot at it. It was therefore blockaded by 5000 infantry and plenty of guns, under General Beauregard. On the morning after his inauguration Lincoln was studying dispatches from Major Anderson, which stated that the garrison could hold out for four weeks, or, by stringent rationing, for a possible maximum of forty days.

The issue before the Government was, in its bare facts, perfectly simple. Were they to try to provision the fort, or evacuate it at once, or let things slide till the limit of the garrison's endurance, and then evacuate? Any attempt to provision was certain to be resisted by the South, and therefore meant war. To evacuate meant a surrender on the first clear-cut issue. Looking back, we are apt to see the problem as so



plain that we cannot understand why Lincoln and his cabinet hesitated. What we are apt to miss is that Lincoln and his cabinet were, in the first place, playing for time, in which more moderate ideas might get a hearing, and in the second place, were playing for the 'Border States' and in particular for Virginia. Virginia was not at all like South Carolina. It was not as a matter of principle rabidly secessionist, but any attempt by the North—or what, as things then were, came to the same thing, by the Federal Government—to 'coerce' the South, was going to swing Virginia straight into the Southern camp. On the other hand, to surrender on the first challenge was bound to discourage the North and the supporters of the Union.

The issue therefore was, I think, a good deal more complicated than at first sight it appears, and could perhaps be stated something like this: 'We cannot provision Fort Sumter without sending an armed force to secure that the provisions get into the fort. That would be represented, even if the South fired the first shot, as 'coercion'; it would therefore make war certain, and besides would lose us Virginia. Every day we can wait makes one of two things more likely, either that the more moderate opinion in the South will gain weight, when it is seen that the new President is not a firebrand—which would be much the best thing, though not, alas, very probable—or that the hotheads in the South will stampede their government into the first open act of war—a very poor second best, but better than that we should start the war. As against all this, it is just barely possible that the South, urged on by South Carolina, is bluffing, and that if we call the bluff at once and firmly we shall get both the good things we want, a peaceful settlement and the firm establishment of the Union. But anyway it is quite certain that if we do not act there will be a body of opinion that the administration is weak and will not stand up for the principles which it has stated, and this body of

opinion might be in the North so disastrously large that if we later came to war we should get much less determined backing from our own side than we should get for a conflict brought on by resolute action now.'

On the 9th of March Lincoln called a meeting of his cabinet and put to them the following question: 'Assuming it to be possible to now provision Fort Sumter, is it wise to attempt it?' (The 'assuming' is important. General Scott, then at the head of the army, had said that it would need 20,000 men to do the job and he had not got them; but Lincoln wanted an opinion on policy, not on military operations.) The members of the cabinet went away and in a week's time gave the President their answers. Blair was the only one who came out with a good flat-footed 'Yes', on the plain grounds that to provision the fort would 'vindicate the hardy courage of the North, and the determination of the people and their President to maintain the authority of the Government'. Blair was not a distinguished member of Lincoln's cabinet, partly because his office brought him less into direct contact with the war than most of them, but I think that his answer ought to make us think well of him. He saw the one essential point, as Lincoln came to see it himself, and said so, in plain words. Chase, the ambitious politician, sat on the stile, with a leg each side, so that he could later pretend that he had been getting over whichever way the cat ultimately jumped. The other five said 'No', for a variety of reasons, some thoughtful, if probably wrong, others, I think, showing nothing but fear of responsibility. Lincoln took the answers for consideration, and things drifted as before, while the impression grew that the administration would evacuate the fort.

On 1st April Lincoln had to deal with the first real crisis in his cabinet. Seward had many great qualities, which later came out. He was also a politician in grain, who knew he was a skilful politician, and loved the tricky game of politics. He



saw himself as the possible saviour of his country, and thought (as was indeed true) that he was much more adroit than the untrained Middle-Western lawyer under whom the mysterious ways of Providence had called on him to serve. He had already been conducting some tortuous 'dickerings' with representatives of the South which in the end did no serious harm, but on the 1st April he presented to Lincoln a very remarkable document. He called it 'Some thoughts for the President's consideration', and he dated it. It was a very suitable document for All Fools' Day.

It started off, not unreasonably, by complaining that there was at the moment no declared policy, domestic or foreign. It went on to advocate the evacuation of Fort Sumter on the almost incredible grounds (incredible, that is, in view of the plain facts and Lincoln's no less plain pronouncements) that to do so would 'change the question before the public from one upon slavery or about slavery for a question upon union or disunion'. But it went on to even more startling flights of fancy. It advocated a demand for explanations from a variety of foreign countries, and the immediate declaration of war on them if the explanations were not satisfactory. There was, I suppose, a sort of demented grain of sense in this crazy proposal, in so far as a catastrophic danger from outside might, for the moment, have overridden internal dissension, and turned the quarrelling States into the United States. But the dangers of the plan were extreme, and the rest of Seward's document made it clear that he pictured himself as the astute and powerful Secretary of State, riding this needless whirlwind of his own creation, and putting the President quietly into the background. He finished by saying this, that whatever policy was adopted there must be an energetic prosecution of it, and that for this purpose it must be somebody's business to pursue and direct it incessantly. 'Either the President must do it himself, and be all the while active in it, or

‘Devolve it on some member of his cabinet. Once adopted, debates on it must end, and all agree and abide.’

‘It is not my especial province.’

‘But I neither seek to evade nor assume responsibility.’

It was not true that this was not ‘his especial province’, since he was Secretary of State, whose special province foreign policy very specially and inescapably was. All this meant in plain terms was that he wanted to be in full and dictator-like control of foreign policy, with a series of blank cheques which the President and the rest of the cabinet would sign on the dotted line.

Lincoln’s reply, if anyone had seen it but Seward, would have convinced any doubters then, as it convinces us now, that he could not be thrown off his balance and that he knew how to handle men. He showed no sign at all of getting on a high horse. He answered the earlier points very quietly and tellingly. On the wild-cat scheme of foreign policy he made no comment at all. He finished by quoting Seward’s last remarks, down to ‘agree and abide’—just to remind Seward of the outrageousness of what he had said—and then commented: ‘I remark that if this must be done, I must do it. If a general line of policy is adopted, I apprehend there is no danger of its being changed without good reason, or continuing to be a subject of unnecessary debate; still, upon points arising in its progress I wish, and suppose I am entitled to have, the advice of the cabinet.’

It would be hard to find two sentences that say so much not only so shortly but so quietly, and, considering what they are saying, so gently. He knew that Seward was an able enough man to understand the implications of what was not directly expressed. Lincoln was saying:

1. I am President, and I cannot abdicate, nor devolve my authority on anyone else.

2. Matters of policy are matters for consultation with the



cabinet. You can trust me to see that there is no idle discussion, but, since this is not an autocracy, discussion there will be.

3. You are my Secretary of State, and I rely on you for advice in your special sphere as I rely on other members of the cabinet for advice in theirs.

This cold douche, so quietly applied, brought Seward to his senses, and brought out all the best in him, which was a very excellent best. From then on he applied all his great gifts, of which he was well aware, with unfailing loyalty to the business of supplementing the deficiencies, of which he was equally well aware, in a man whom from then on he recognized as a great leader. A little later he wrote to his wife: 'Executive force and vigour are rare qualities; the President is the best of us.'

I have given a good deal of space to this episode, because I think that any man can learn a lot from Seward. He was a very able man; he had a far quicker mind than Lincoln, and like all men with quick minds he was impatient of a mind that moved more slowly; he might well have been President, and put in a position where his ability, his quickness and his wide experience would have had full scope. He would have liked the highest office, but I do not think that his ambition was, as it was with Chase, merely personal. He passionately wanted to be able to use his rare gifts in the service of his country. But he had insight, and he had that honesty, the hardest and rarest of all honesties, which could see in a man in many ways his inferior a kind of greatness which was beyond his own and of a different order. And he devoted himself to the business of making that greatness as effective as it could be made.

On 29th March the cabinet met again, with Cameron absent, and this time the votes of the remaining six were equally divided. Lincoln made his decision, that an expedition to provision Fort Sumter should sail on 6th April, and gave his orders to that effect. On the 6th he sent a messenger to

Charleston, with orders to read the following message to Governor Pickens: 'I am directed by the President of the United States to notify you to expect an attempt will be made to supply Fort Sumter with provisions only; and that, if such an attempt be not resisted, no effort to throw in men, arms, or ammunition will be made without further notice, or in case of an attack upon the fort.'

There at last was the issue clear for the whole country and the world to look at. The Federal Government of the United States proposed to see that one of its garrisons, in one of the forts under its control, had enough to eat. The Confederate Government reacted promptly, and it almost seems as though the Southern President, Jefferson Davis, was determined that the South should fire first. He instructed Beauregard to demand the evacuation of the fort, and if the demand was refused to reduce it. Beauregard offered generous terms, the generosity of which Anderson courteously acknowledged (he had, by the way, been Beauregard's instructor in artillery at West Point), but which he explained his duty forbade him to accept. But he said quite frankly to Beauregard's messengers that he would in any case be compelled to surrender in a few days from lack of food. Beauregard asked him to fix a date for surrender. Anderson replied that if neither attacked in the meantime by the South, nor provisioned by his own Government, he would surrender on the 15th. This was not good enough, and in the early hours of the 12th an ultimatum was delivered to Anderson that the batteries would open in an hour's time. Thus in the early dawn of 12th April, 1861, an old Virginian farmer named Edward Ruffin, a bitter secessionist, was given the doubtful, but to him very welcome, honour of firing the first gun of the Civil War. The batteries pounded the fort for thirty-three hours, and on the 13th Anderson surrendered. On Sunday the 14th the garrison marched out with all the honours of war, boarded one of the relief ships, and sailed for New



York. Anderson took with him the fort's flag. On 14th April, 1865, he had the honour of running up, with his own hands, the same tattered flag over the same fort.

On that Sunday in Washington the cabinet met, and Lincoln issued a proclamation calling out the militia of the States of the Union to the number of 75,000, since the States which he named, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, had 'combinations too powerful to be suppressed by ordinary procedure of government'. There had been months of uncertainty, during which he had, I think, tried sincerely for peace. He had put up with misunderstanding from outside, and perhaps—much harder to endure—uncertainty in his own mind; and he had not even been always sure of himself. But always he had held an inflexible determination that war was not the worst of all evils, but only the second worst; the worst was the destruction of the Union. He must, I think, have felt, in spite of all the daunting weight of responsibility, a profound relief that all the doubt and the manœuvring were over, that the course was clear, and that he had now one thing to do—to steer the ship somehow, through whatever storms were coming, to the harbour of a re-established Union.

That same evening something happened which must have lifted his heart. His old rival Douglas came to see him and discuss the situation. Lincoln welcomed him, as the sole witness of the interview recorded, with outstretched hands and a 'benignant' smile. They talked for two hours. Douglas said that Lincoln should have asked for 200,000 troops, not 75,000. He made some suggestions about strategic points which needed looking after, and said that bringing Federal troops through Baltimore was going to cause trouble—as it did. Lincoln, we are told, was 'an earnest and gratified listener'. But above all, Douglas made it clear that he was heart and soul behind the President, and that all the thousands of men and women in the



Fig. 1. The building of the University of the Pacific, San Francisco, California.





2. *An unusual portrait of Lincoln without the familiar beard.*

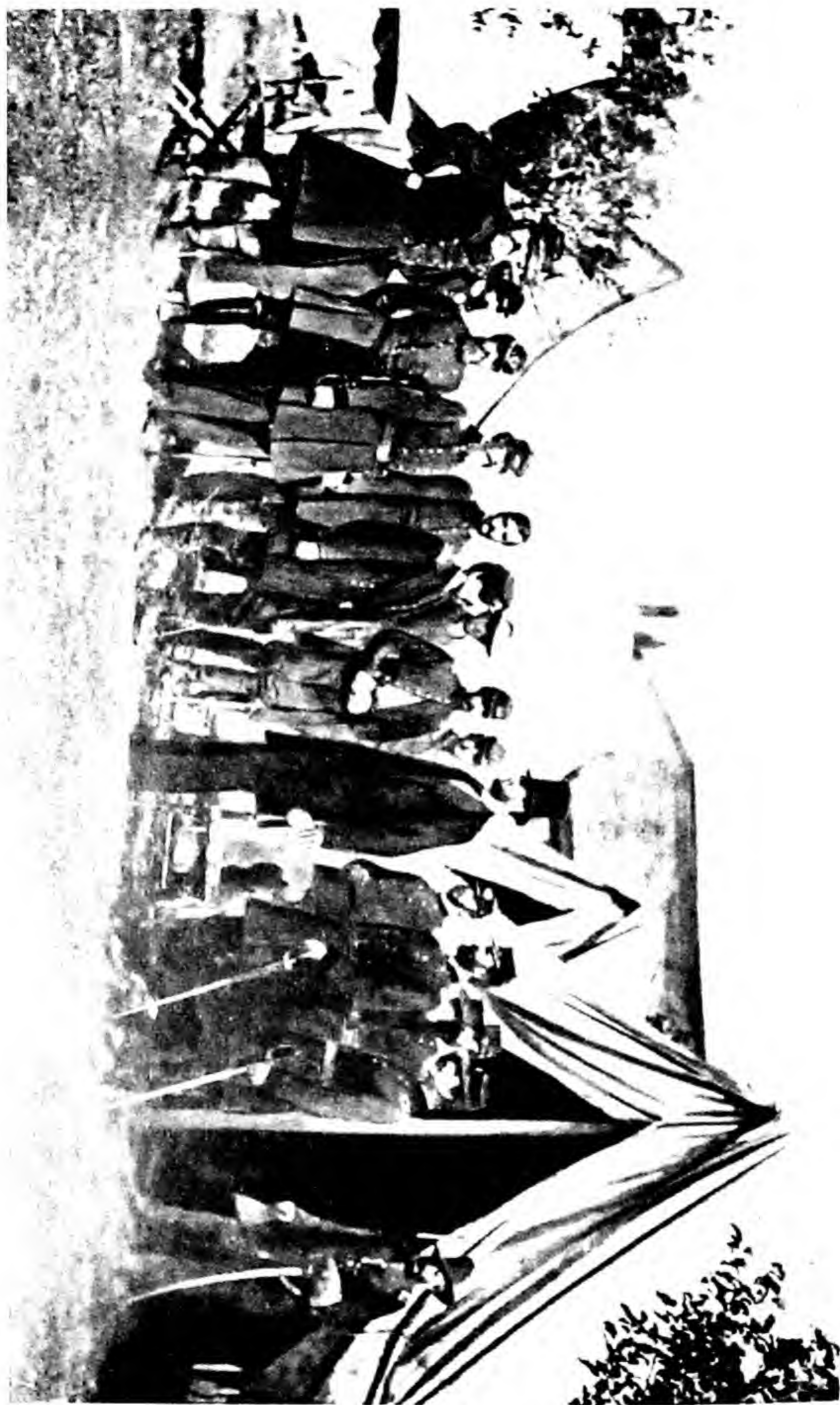


3. *And the more familiar public face, perhaps not so revealing.*



4. *Abraham Lincoln with his son 'Ted'.*





United States who still looked to him as their leader were going to know it. Next day a short statement from him appeared in the papers. It was plain, honest, and unmistakable. He was, he said, still unalterably opposed to the administration on all political issues, but he was prepared fully to sustain the President in the exercise of all his constitutional functions, to preserve the Union, maintain the government, and defend the capital. The capital was in danger, and must be defended at all hazards, and at any expense of men and money. He and the President, he added, had spoken 'of the present and the future, without any reference to the past'.

It may, I know, be thought that in an earlier chapter I have been less than fair to Douglas. I think that he was an astute politician and a 'bonny fighter'; but he was also the sort of man who, when the occasion which challenges him is great enough, sheds all his smaller qualities and lets his great qualities lift him to the level of the occasion. He was a tired man, within three months of his death, but with his old fighting spirit he called on his last reserves of strength to serve the cause he believed in. 'He knew,' as one of Lincoln's biographers finely says, 'he knew that he had trumpets left, and he blew them to mass his cohorts behind Lincoln's maintenance of the Union.'

And now, while the Northern troops are hurrying to defend the imperilled capital, let us look at the whole situation as it confronted Lincoln, and the kind of problems which he was going to have to solve. This emphatically does not mean the problems which he at the moment *knew* he was going to have to solve. Lincoln knew very clearly what the goal of his journey was to be, but he was never a man for crossing his bridges till he came to them. Indeed, he once said that his policy was to have no policy; in other words, that he proposed to shape his policy in the light of immediate events as they happened, and not hamper himself by trying to shape, for a



more or less distant future, a policy which might be quite unsuitable when that future arrived. But that does not mean that we, looking back, cannot make things clearer for ourselves by examining the various factors which governed the progress of the war, and seeing ahead of Lincoln what his difficulties were to be.

In the first place, it is quite vital, if we are to understand this war at all, that we should realize with our minds, and, even more, if possible, feel with our hearts, what it was that the two sides were fighting for.

When once the war was joined the South was fighting for its existence. Before the war there were possibilities of compromise. There were moderate elements in the South, some strongly against secession, and some at least lukewarm about slavery. If these elements had been more positively effective some adjustment might have been possible. But from the moment that the first gun was fired on Fort Sumter there was no possibility of compromise, but only of victory for one side or the other. From that moment the South was fighting for existence, for the continuance of a way of life in which those who were fighting had been brought up, and which their fathers and their grandfathers had handed down to them. They were fighting, as they saw it, for freedom, for the right to order their own affairs as they thought right. They were fighting, that is, *against* something very clear and to them abominable, the domination of the North.

The North was not in the least fighting for existence. It was fighting for an idea—the idea of the Union. It was fighting for something the importance of which lay in the comparatively distant future, for the preservation of the Union without which America could not be a great and united nation. But it was not in any sense at all fighting for *self*-preservation. The 'way of life' of any individual citizen of the Northern States would hardly have been affected if at any moment during the



war the North had thrown up the sponge. All the North had to do, at any moment, to secure peace, was to 'let the South go'. And as between any two combatants of whom one is fighting for his life and the other is not, the odds are apt to be heavily on the first. Here was Lincoln's first great problem. Through four weary years he had to keep the spirit of the North keyed up to fighting pitch, to keep alive in their hearts the certainty that the Union was something for which no price, in blood and wealth, was too high to pay.

This same factor determined the 'war aims' of the two sides. The South had won the war—that is to say, it had secured what it was fighting for—if it could get the North tired of a contest which seemed unprofitable. It was not in the least necessary for the South to 'conquer' the North, even if that had been possible, which it almost certainly was not. But the North could not win the war unless it could smash the South, could hammer it to a state of exhaustion—very different from a state of tiredness—in which from mere lack of men to fight, munitions for them to fight with, and food to feed them with while they fought, it was physically impossible to continue the war, and the hated Union would have to be accepted. In other words, very briefly, the South would win if the North could be persuaded to say 'We withdraw', but the North could win only when the South could be compelled to say 'We surrender'. It is important to keep this in mind when we are considering the conduct of the war—particularly, for example, when we are watching the operations of McClellan and Lincoln's dealings with him—because it means that what is known as the 'time factor' cut two different ways.

In material things time was on the side of the North, enabling the North to develop its far greater resources in men and munitions, and, owing to the Northern blockade, slowly cramping and starving the South. In 'spiritual' things time was on the side of the South. So long as the South could keep its



armies in being and get the North to waste strength without being able to plant a knock-out blow, every month that passed was likely to increase the war-weariness of the North.

It is clear, then, that rapid and positive success was of the most vital importance to the North. And this rapid and positive success was precisely what Lincoln's generals in the early part of the war could not, or at any rate did not, give him. This made his task doubly hard. He had to keep the Northern spirit alive and vigorous not only against mere lapse of time, which was bad enough, but against what looked like incompetent waste of time, which was much worse. As month followed month and nothing in particular happened, there was a real danger that a pessimistic feeling might spread through the North that their generals were incompetent and that the South was invincible. And these months of non-success were the worst possible preparation for the hard and bloody work that lay ahead. The South, even when it was being bled white, had always such things as the Shenandoah Valley campaign to look back on, clear proof of the battle-winning capacities of its generals and its men.

What, at the beginning, appeared to be the prospects of the two sides from the purely military point of view? To us, looking back, the outcome seems a foregone conclusion. We look at the disproportion in numbers and resources, and at the Northern control of the sea, and we let ourselves be blinded by the fact that the North did in fact win, till we are almost tempted to think the South foolish ever to suppose it had a chance. We should be wise to remember that the great majority of intelligent observers in Europe for a long time expected the opposite result. It is true that this expectation depended largely on a rather vague impression, fostered by the letters of its very able correspondent to the *London Times*, that the South was much more desperately in earnest than the North. But even a cool and detailed summing up of the



military factors made it clear to people then, and should make it clear to us now, that the case of the South was at least very far from hopeless.

The North had three great advantages: it had superior numbers, some twenty million against the five or six million whites and three and a half million slaves of the South; it had superior material resources, and, what was even more important, factories, and men used to working in them, which could turn these material resources into equipment for war, so that it could arm and clothe its larger forces more efficiently and over a longer period than the mainly agricultural South; it had almost complete command of the sea, so that it could blockade the South and prevent the importing from overseas of the supplies which the South did not possess or could not manufacture.

Those were very considerable advantages. But they were about the only advantages which the North had, and the first of them was far from being, at any rate at first, as overwhelming as it looks on paper. It is no use in war *merely* having numbers. Unless you can get the fighting-men of your numbers properly organized into a disciplined army, and, above all, can produce a sufficient supply of good officers, with competent generals at the top, and first-rate men to command battalions, batteries, companies, and so on below them, you might as well not have the numbers at all.

And as against these advantages the South could set others. In the first place, and most important of all, the South was operating all the time on what are known as 'interior lines'. That is to say, that the Southern armies were holding the 'perimeter', the outer edge, of an area which was in their own possession. Their lines for supply and for the movement of troops were inside this perimeter, and roughly speaking radiated from a centre. Within that area they had complete freedom of movement, limited only by the existence or absence



of the necessary roads and railways, and by geographical obstacles such as rivers and mountain-chains. Hence they were living on their own country, they could transfer troops with reasonable ease and rapidity from one sector to another, and it was comparatively easy for a central control to co-ordinate the various movements. They were, that is, somewhat in the position of the Germans in the so-called 'Fortress of Europe' of 1943-4, though without the fatal distraction of having to hold down restless conquered nations. Further, as is clear from the general 'war aims' mentioned above, they knew that they would operate on interior lines to the end. Their whole strategy forbade any attempt to invade the North. Their whole business was defence. No doubt, if they had able enough generals, they would make sallies beyond the perimeter, to distract the enemy and make him split up his strength, since a purely passive defence is a poor defence. But these were only sallies, and after they were made they could fall back on the centre. If in the end they had to retreat and reduce their perimeter, they shortened their supply lines and made supply and troop movements easier. Troops operating on exterior lines are handicapped by greater difficulties of supply, and even more by greater difficulties of co-ordination. As they advance, and break or crush in the perimeter, the problems of supply become more acute, but the problems of co-ordination simpler.

So far it sounds as though all the advantages were with the armies operating on interior lines. That is not quite so. The attacking force always has the initiative, that is, it can make up its mind on what section of the perimeter it is going to make, for the moment, its main drive, whereas the defence has to guess where the main attack is coming. That does not much matter to the defence so long as it is fairly sure that there will be only *one* main attack, however well disguised. It keeps its reserves in hand, and waits till the enemy's intentions are clear,

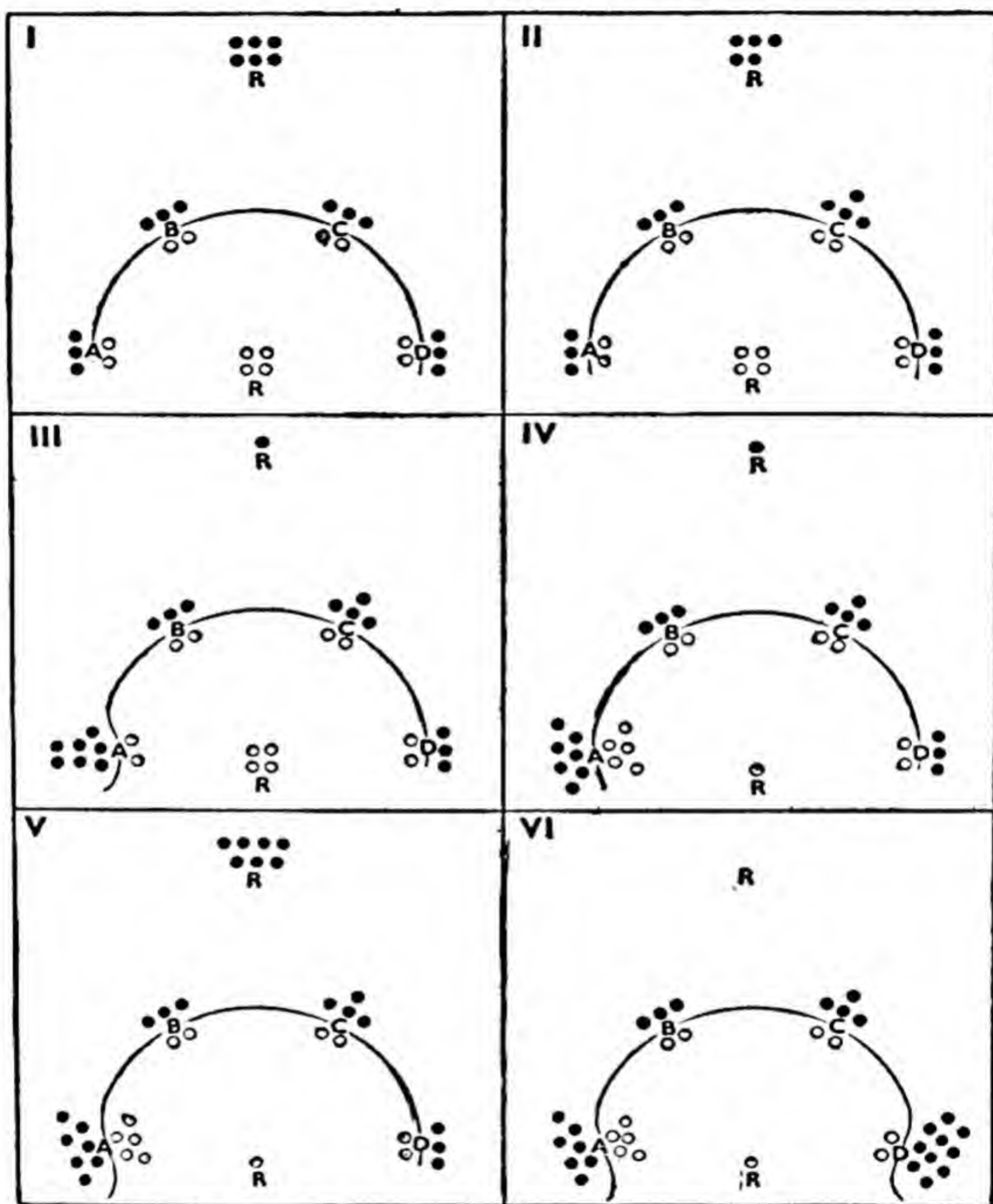


then sending them to the threatened point, either regaining the ground which has probably been lost in the first days of the attack or at least what is now called 'stabilizing' a new front. And the attacking enemy cannot call off his troops and get them round on the circumference for an attack on a fresh sector so quickly as the defenders can move fresh troops to the newly threatened point. But the position becomes very different if the attackers, on the exterior lines, command such numbers that they can attack in strength at two or more places at once. Then the advantages of interior lines are neutralized, or more than neutralized. The fact that you can *move* ten thousand men from A to B in half the time that it will take the enemy to move the same number between the same points does not mean that you can *have* ten thousand men at the two points at the same time. And the fact that your lines of supply and communication are radiating from a centre within a restricted area, which earlier was an asset, is now liable to cause congestion and chaos, which is far worse than the slowness of movement which the enemy's divergent lines impose upon him. All this may, at the moment, seem a long way from Lincoln, but it is important for the Civil War, and therefore for Lincoln, and also for many other wars; so let me try to make it clearer by a series of diagrams, which, like most diagrams about war, is far too simple, and neglects all sorts of things which do in fact decide the issue of battles, like the fact that a leading general had a bad cold, or some subordinate commander lost his head, or some orders went astray because the dispatch rider was thrown off his horse or skidded into a ditch, but still will help to explain the main point. It is assumed all through that the defenders can hold their line fairly comfortably so long as their numerical inferiority in any sector is not worse than 3 to 2, and can still hold, though only with difficulty, if the inferiority is 2 to 1, but that their lines will be broken if they have to fight at a greater inferiority



than that for more than a few days. Now assume first that the defenders have 12 units to defend four sectors of front, A, B, C, and D, that the enemy have 18 units with which to attack the same four sectors, and that each side to begin with keeps one-third of its units in reserve. The picture is then as in I. The enemy decide to make a main attack at A, and first feint by sending one unit from reserve to C. The defenders, knowing that, if this attack develops, they can still get troops there in time from reserve, refuse to be drawn (II); the enemy now send 4 units from reserve to A, and drive a bulge into the line (III); but the defenders, now knowing where the attack is coming, send 3 units to A, and hold the attack (IV). If the enemy now try to push the attack at C by using their one remaining unit and by withdrawing some troops from A and transferring them by the exterior lines to C, the defenders have ample time first to get their remaining reserve unit to C and to transfer what troops are needed from A, since they are moving by a shorter route.

But now suppose that the enemy started with a superiority of 2 to 1, i.e. 24 units against 12, and suppose further that the first stages of the business go exactly as before, but that having arrived at stage IV, which is now V, the enemy, two days after the attack at A, throw the whole of their reserve, which is now 7 units, not 1, against D (VI). Now you notice that the defenders still have, taking the four sectors *as a whole*, the bare minimum of a 2 to 1 inferiority with which we assumed they could just hold, but they have more than they need at A and B, and much less than they need at D, and unless they can reinforce D very quickly they are going to be broken there. They can send up the one reserve unit at once, but that is not going to restore the balance, and the only other way they can get enough troops to D is by disengaging a unit and a half from A, which is still under heavy attack, together with half a unit from B, and getting them across to D. This is



*Exterior and Interior Lines. See pages 117, etc.*



quite a different matter from disengaging troops from A when the attack was weakening there and the enemy were themselves transferring troops, and the odds are against the defenders being able to do it in time.

Besides their interior lines the South had two advantages in the quality of its man-power. A higher proportion of men in the South than in the North were trained to an open-air life, to hard exercise, and to the use of a gun. And a higher proportion of them were used to a spare diet, and so were more naturally able to stand up to the privations which were entailed by the sort of campaigning that lay ahead. It was not at all that the Northerners were poorer fighters than the Southerners. Any such idea was disproved again and again as the war went on, and in battle after battle both sides, without distinction, stood up without breaking to losses as heavy as in any armies that have ever fought. The Northerners were every bit as *courageous* fighters as the Southerners, but with many of them, especially those from the towns, it took longer to turn them into *efficient* fighters, and imposed a heavier strain on supply organization to keep them *fit* fighters.

Finally there was the matter of generals. Both sides had to find the leaders for their armies, and they were not easy to find. The military academy of West Point drew in about equal numbers from South and North, but the number of professional officers who were turned out from West Point was the merest drop in the bucket compared with the numbers that were wanted on both sides. Apart from this, though there were men on both sides who had seen service, there was not a man on either side who at the beginning of the war had commanded any really considerable body of men in action. In the first battle of the war, of three divisional commanders and nine brigadiers on the Union side, eight had never been in action at all. But in this matter of generals something happened three days after the surrender of Fort Sumter which gave the

South an outstanding advantage, and indeed probably changed the whole course of the war.

That something was the secession of Virginia. With their State there went over to the South two trained professional soldiers, who were not only much abler than any that the North could put against them, but were two of the ablest generals in the history of war. They were Lee and Jackson. Lincoln had offered Lee a post which would have led to the command of the Union armies. Lee was not in favour of either slavery or secession, but he felt that he could not desert his State. Had he felt able to accept Lincoln's offer, I do not think it is a fanciful estimate that the war would have been over within two years, probably within one. As it was, Lincoln's second great problem, second only to that of maintaining the spirit of the North, was to find any generals who would win battles, even when he could find some who did not try to mix politics with soldiering. He could do it only by the expensive method of trial and error. In the nature of the case, seeing that professional officers were so few, there had to be a great deal of trial; but, mainly through no fault of Lincoln's, there was a disastrously high proportion of error, and it was not till somewhere about the middle of the war, when Grant had proved himself, that Lincoln could feel a moment's peace of mind.



# 8

## THE FIRST YEAR OF WAR

Now let us go back to Lincoln, sitting in Washington on 15th April. The call for troops was out, but the capital was completely undefended. And for three days not a single man came. A volunteer guard was organized for the defence of the White House. On the 17th Virginia seceded. Harper's Ferry, 40 miles up-river to the north-east of Washington, was captured by the Confederates, as were the great naval docks at Norfolk, 100 miles to the south. And the camp-fires of the Confederates could be seen along the south bank of the Potomac. The situation in Washington was very odd, and indeed to us, looking back at it, it seems almost incredible. The government departments were thrown into temporary chaos by the resignation of men of Southern sympathies; but these people were perfectly free just to hand in their resignations and take the next train to the south. And the city was a queer kind of neutral no-man's-land. People heart and soul with the South, and wearing secessionist badges, were free to walk about in it, and reporters and spies could go in and out as they chose.

There were many in the South who urged an immediate raid on Washington, just as very soon the cry of the North was

'On to Richmond', the city only 100 miles from Washington to which the Confederate Government had been moved from Alabama. And in no book that I have read have I seen a clear statement why the South did not attempt the raid. It does not appear that any effective resistance could have been put up if the South had been quick enough. A remark of old General Scott, the then commander-in-chief, is worth quoting. He was asked about the defences of Fort Washington, ten miles down-river from the capital. He said that he thought the South could capture it at the expense of one bottle of whisky, since the garrison consisted of one old soldier 'who is entirely reliable when he is sober'.

However, the raid was not made, and on the 18th the troops began to arrive, first 500 men from Pennsylvania, and on the next day the 6th Massachusetts Regiment, who had trouble in getting through Baltimore and had lost four men killed and seventeen wounded in the process.

On the 20th Lincoln acted, ordering the seizure, in all telegraph offices in the Northern States, of the originals or copies of all telegrams out and in for the preceding twelve months, appropriating great sums of money for the conduct of the war, and taking steps to strengthen the fleet. But Lincoln was possibly nearer to despair during these ten days than at any other time during the war. Mails did not come, troops did not come, the railways were blocked, and the capital and the government in it seemed wholly isolated. On the 23rd a little news trickled through, of great meetings in New York and the dispatch of the crack 7th New York Regiment, of the resolution of the Governor of Rhode Island to sail with troops and guns for Washington. But mass meetings 600 miles away, and enthusiastic governors on paper, were precious little good to a lonely President in an undefended capital, and a flimsy barrier against the expected attack. On the 23rd his secretary heard him say as he looked down the



Potomac for the first sight of the ships, 'Why don't they come! Why don't they come!' And later, to a messenger from Connecticut, seeming, as the messenger reported, depressed beyond measure, he said, 'What is the North about? Do they *know* our condition?' And the next day, speaking to the wounded men of the 6th Massachusetts, in 'a sad ironic tone': 'I don't believe there is any North! The 7th Regiment is a myth! Rhode Island is not known in our geography any longer! You are the only Northern realities.'

But the next day the black cloud of depression lifted. The famous 7th arrived, and 1200 from Rhode Island, and the Butler Brigade of 1200 from Massachusetts. The railways were repaired and a line for transport of troops established. By the end of the month there were 10,000 troops in Washington, and the capital was secure against anything but a major operation, for which the South was not yet ready.

There was now for a short time something of a lull, while both sides got ready for more important operations. And this is perhaps as good a moment as any to underline something that we need to keep in mind about this war, something that was from first to last present, and bitterly present, to Lincoln. This war was something quite different from wars as we know them, conflicts between nations. It was, in plain fact, and in a sense far deeper and more poignant than the phrase suggests, a 'Brother's War'. 'South' and 'North' are convenient labels, but they represent the military and geographical situation more truly than they do anything else, and we should perhaps be better to stick to 'Confederate' and 'Federal' or 'Union'. In this war men fought for what they believed in, and their beliefs cut across not only lines on the map, but ties of blood and family. The usual instances are in all the books but they are worth repeating.

Farragut, the famous Federal admiral, came from Alabama; Lee's nephew commanded the Federal ships on the River

James; there was a Commodore Porter of the Union navy whose two sons fought under Jackson for the Confederates; Mrs. Lincoln herself had three brothers who served in the Confederate armies and died in that service; in each army there was a Major-General Crittenden, and the two were brothers; the mother of a famous president of later years, Theodore Roosevelt, came from Georgia, lived in New York, taught her boy to pray for the Union armies, and had two brothers fighting in the Confederate navy. There were plenty of cases as the war went on where a man of one army or the other, as the line went forward, came on the body of his son or his father, in the uniform of the other army, killed for all he knew by his own bullet. And here, to end with, are two examples. One lady on a Mississippi steamboat said to another that she had been born in New Orleans (far south in Louisiana), was living in New York, and had two sons, of whom one was in the 7th New York, and the other in the New Orleans Zouaves. The other is more closely connected with Lincoln and shows how difficult for many men the decision was, but also how free a man was to choose. A brother-in-law of Mrs. Lincoln came to see the President. The President offered him a commission in the Union armies. He said: 'I wish I could see my way—I will try to do what is right. You shall have my answer in a few days.' He joined the Confederate army. Here was a man, after a month of war, who came to the leader of one side to consult with him which side he should join.

For two months Lincoln's whole efforts, and those of his subordinates, were directed to producing something that could be called an army out of chaos and a mass of completely untrained volunteers. By the beginning of July over 200,000 men, scattered all over the Northern States, were enrolled, and there was something which had at least a superficial resemblance to an army, of 30,000, in and round Washington, under General McDowell, ready if called on to deal with a



Southern army, of some 20,000, under General Beauregard (the commander at Fort Sumter) which was waiting at Manassas, some twenty miles south-west of Washington. Both McDowell and the Commander-in-Chief, Scott, advised delay, till the troops were better trained. From the military point of view, and so long as they looked only at their own forces, they were no doubt right. To have put these 30,000 men, inadequately trained, poorly disciplined, and extremely imperfectly officered, into the field against even a third of their number of professional soldiers would have been suicidal. But the North was clamouring for an early success and a short war, so that Lincoln was probably right in deciding for action, as he was quite certainly right in pointing out to the reluctant McDowell, 'If you are green, they are green also.'

As a result there was staged on Sunday, 21st July, near Manassas, what must always be to the technical observer, who is not thinking in terms of human distress, and killed and wounded men, one of the most comic battles in the whole history of war. In the first place, 'staged' is the right word for it. Everyone, including the commanders, knew that it was going to happen and where. Crowds of people flocked out from Washington to get, as it were, grandstand seats for a football game, taking their lunches with them. The clash between two undisciplined armies resulted in complete chaos. The battle was admirably designed on paper by both sides, but the confusion of actual fighting, with bullets flying, orders going astray, subordinate commanders having no notion what their next move should be and having no experience of battle to guide them, made very short work of paper plans. And by the afternoon the Northern armies, who had marched out with undisciplined hilarity, were in a retreat so undisciplined that it amounted to a rout, while the Southern army was so equally disorganized by a paper success that some of it was also in retreat, and the rest was in no sort of condition to



pursue. The whole thing was the oddest possible prelude to four years during which, in battle after battle, there were displayed generalship as able, and disciplined courage as unflinching, as in any battles in the annals of war.

The chief importance of this first engagement was its effect on the temper of the two sides; it gave the North a shock, and woke it up to realize the kind of job it had on its hands. As one Northerner said in a letter, 'We have undertaken to make war without in the least knowing how. We have made a false start and we have discovered it. It only remains to start afresh.' After a few days of black despondency the North set to work to learn its lesson, to serve its apprenticeship in what it now saw was not a light-hearted game that anyone could play, but an exacting professional business. On the other hand, it encouraged a dangerous spirit of arrogant self-confidence in the South. True, Beauregard had been unable to pursue, but none the less the miserable Yankees had run.

In this battle two men who later became famous first made their names, one of them in a literal sense. A Colonel Jackson of the Confederate army probably prevented a Union victory by getting his men to stand firm at a critical moment, and the story went that someone who was watching said, 'There is Jackson standing like a stone wall', and that thus Jackson got the nickname by which he was always afterwards known, 'Stonewall Jackson'. It was about as unsuitable a nickname as could have been invented for a man who was one of the eagles of war, who won his successes by extreme rapidity of movement, and sudden violence of attack. The other man was Sherman. He also managed to hold his men firm, and at the end of the day he formed them in hollow square and formed the rear-guard to cover the routed retreat on Washington.

On the day after Bull Run<sup>1</sup> Lincoln appointed to the com-

<sup>1</sup> 'First Bull Run' is the other name for this, the first of two battles which took place near Manassas. For the second see p. 146.



mand of the 'Army of the Potomac', that is to say, the whole of the Union troops around Washington, a General McClellan. He was nominally under the control of old General Scott, but he claimed and was given a good deal of independence, and in November, when Scott retired, McClellan was made Commander-in-Chief of all the Union armies in all theatres. He was the first on the long list of Lincoln's 'trial and error' experiments, and argument is unceasing whether he should have been written off as an error much sooner than he was, or whether he never had a really fair trial.

Some things about him are clear enough, and undoubted. He was young (only thirty-five) and vigorous. He had a magnetic personality, and his troops adored him. He had a real talent for organization, and was a very hard worker. He also had a clear notion of what an army ought to be, not just in organization, but in spirit. As a result it would have been hard, probably impossible, to find a better man, or even one anything like as good, for the immediate job, which was to create an army. The trouble with him was that, having created his army, he could not be persuaded to use it in any active operations, and he became Lincoln's major problem. To understand Lincoln it is necessary to have some sort of picture of McClellan, his inaction and the reasons for it. The picture I shall give will be, on the whole, the unfavourable one, and you must understand that there are things to be said on the other side; but it is better than no picture at all.

He had made a considerable study of the art of war, and there was little that could be learned from books which he had not learned. He could plan a battle on paper as well as anyone, but he found it hard to realize that battles are not won on paper, as though they were chess problems, but in the end, whatever planning on paper has gone before, in the field with men fighting and getting killed. (He had, by the way, seen some service, though never in command of a large body



of men, and there was never the smallest doubt of his own personal courage.) He was one of those students of war who are always thinking in terms of the 'perfect' battle.<sup>1</sup> He made a most significant comment in a letter: 'No prospect of a brilliant victory shall induce me to depart from my intention of gaining success by manœuvring rather than by fighting. . . . I am trying to follow a lesson learned long ago, i.e. not to move until I know that everything is ready, and then to move with the utmost rapidity and energy.' On this there are two things to be said. Manœuvring instead of fighting may be all very well if you have an opponent who will play war according to text-book rules, and preferably also one who will obligingly stay still to be manœuvred round. But if you have an opponent who won't play by the rules, who when you have carefully worked up to a checkmate sweeps the pieces on to the floor and takes to his fists, then manœuvring alone will not win battles. Second, while you are waiting for 'everything to be ready' your opponent has time to make counter-preparations, whereas if you had taken the risk of attacking when you were only, say, three-quarters ready, you might easily have found your opponent only half ready and smashed him.

Further, McClellan was, I think, a thoroughly conceited man, and his promotion to such high position at so early an age had, very naturally, gone to his head. He saw himself not only as the saviour of his country, which he well might have been, but the saviour of his country in one spectacular coup with a minimum of bloodshed. He wrote to his wife, 'I shall carry this thing on *en grand* and crush the rebels in one campaign.' I doubt if anything has been written by others

<sup>1</sup> I should like to quote from a colleague, Mr. A. B. Rodger, to whose helpful criticism and expert knowledge I owe more thanks than should properly be relegated to a footnote, what I think is the best brief summary of McClellan that I know. He thinks that McClellan was a better general than I do, but he says that he had 'the groundsman's mentality'. The groundsman prepares a pitch so perfect that he can hardly bear to see it cut up by cricketers playing on it. For 'pitch' read 'army' and after 'cut up' read 'by fighting with it', and you have McClellan.



against McClellan so revealing and so damning as that sentence of his own.

Finally, he was purely a soldier, and he saw the war as a purely military business. In one way that was a good thing, since it meant that he had, at any rate at first, little or no political ambition, and was not likely to behave as Frémont shortly did. But in another way it was a thoroughly bad thing, because from start to finish he never showed the least realization of the fact that the conduct of any war, and particularly a war of this kind, must be largely governed by political considerations. If, for example, your side are becoming despondent, a partial victory at the moment may be more useful than a complete victory in three months' time; if you wait for your perfect battle, you may find that the spirit of your supporters has so much evaporated through the months of delay that they will not give you the fresh troops to follow it up. And so on. This blindness of McClellan's, coupled with his conceit, made him very impatient of any control by the civilian Government, and wholly deaf to any suggestion from them.

Anyway, let us sum up what McClellan did and did not do in the nine months after he took over command—up, that is, to the end of the first year of the war. By October he had an army of some 160,000 men in front of Washington, well equipped, and growing daily more efficient. Opposite him across the Potomac there were something less than 50,000 Confederates, ill equipped, seriously under-gunned, holding too long a line of inadequate earthworks, and in places using, to maintain a bluff, what were known as 'Quaker guns', i.e., dummies of painted wood. McClellan estimated that he had opposite him 150,000 men holding fortifications 'stronger than those of Sebastopol'. He therefore went on training his army and asking for more troops. 'All quiet along the Potomac' became a joke, and all remained even quieter along the Potomac when McClellan went into winter quarters.



Lincoln behaved with extraordinary patience. He stood between McClellan and the growing impatience of the North. He had chosen his man, he supposed that he was an expert, and he did not propose to interfere with him. Occasionally he did his best to prod him into some kind of action. He wrote him suggestions which McClellan neglected for some days and then sent back with some scribbled notes dismissing them all. He once went to call on McClellan, instead of summoning him to call at the White House as he had every right to do. McClellan was out at a party. When he came in he paid no attention to the fact that the President (who was also by his office Commander-in-Chief), and for that matter the Secretary of State, who had gone with Lincoln, were waiting to see him. He went up to bed and sent down a message that he was in bed and could not see anyone. This was a deliberate snub. But the most that Lincoln could be got to say to this and other similar episodes was, 'I will hold McClellan's horse if he will only bring us success.'

By January Lincoln's patience was wearing a trifle thin. He said that if something was not done soon 'the bottom will be out of the whole affair', and that if the general did not want to use the army he himself would be glad to borrow it. In February Lincoln stopped making suggestions and gave orders, that the Army of the Potomac was to be ready to move on 22nd February to seize Manassas Junction, 'all details to be in the discretion of the commander-in-chief'.

But McClellan had spent much time since December in evolving a new and even superior plan of campaign. He explained that a direct attack was undesirable, and proposed by enveloping movements to capture Richmond. He even, on 13th February, said that in ten days he would be in Richmond. On 23rd February he was precisely as far from Richmond as he had been on the 13th, and had not moved a man. On 7th and 8th March Lincoln issued more orders, directing McClellan



to divide his force into four corps, naming the generals to command them, and saying that whatever operations were undertaken enough troops were to be left for the defence of the capital. Here Lincoln almost certainly made a mistake. The organization of his force, and the selection of generals to work under him, was McClellan's business, and not the President's.

On 9th March came the news that the whole Confederate force had left their lines and moved off south. McClellan was stirred to action. He marched his army out, looked at the deserted lines, and—it may be supposed with a certain chagrin—at the Quaker guns, and marched back again into his lines. However, this farce did stimulate McClellan at least to change the scene in which he proposed to contemplate the enemy's entrenchments. He moved his whole army down to Yorktown. Here the Confederates had constructed hasty field-works, which they were holding with some 16,000 men. McClellan, even when he first arrived in front of them, had several times that strength. Lincoln, in strong terms, urged an attack. 'It is indispensable that you strike a blow. . . . The country will not fail to note—is noting now—that the present hesitation to move upon the entrenched enemy is but the story of Manassas repeated.' And the Confederate commander wrote to Lee, 'No one but McClellan could have hesitated.'

McClellan, however, was taking no risks. He wrote to Lincoln, 'Do not misunderstand the apparent inaction here. Not a day, not an hour has been lost. Works have been constructed which may almost be called gigantic.' They might also have been called needless and useless. When McClellan was ready to start his bombardment the Confederates quietly withdrew, McClellan bloodlessly occupied the empty lines, and telegraphed to Washington, with an air of satisfaction, 'Yorktown is in our possession. I shall push the enemy to the wall.'

This was in April. What, in nine months, had McClellan accomplished? His first job he had done quite admirably. He had made a real army out of a willing but untrained rabble. Apart from that he had avoided defeat—not a very hard task if the enemy shows no disposition to attack. He had twice taken over (one cannot say ‘captured’) entrenchments from which the enemy, in their own time, and with no sort of interference from him, had quietly retired. And he had occupied Yorktown. It was an inglorious record for a man commanding troops which never outnumbered the enemy by less than two to one, and usually outnumbered him by more. It is fair to say that McClellan was throughout execrably served by his intelligence (for which he relied, owing to his weakness in cavalry, largely on the Pinkerton detective agency) who perpetually exaggerated the enemy’s numbers, and that in the battles which immediately succeeded Yorktown he showed some real qualities. But there is no getting over that nine months’ record.

Meantime, during the autumn and winter, Lincoln had had plenty of other problems to occupy his attention besides that of the dilatory McClellan. In the first place, there was a Union general called Frémont commanding in Missouri. He shared McClellan’s liking for grandiose schemes on paper, but he also fancied himself as a politician. He therefore issued, on his own authority, and without consulting the Government, a remarkable proclamation. He started with the pompous remark that circumstances, in his judgement of sufficient urgency, rendered it necessary that the commanding general should assume the administrative powers of the State. He then declared martial law throughout the State, under which all persons bearing arms north of a line across the centre of the State would be shot, after court-martial, and further, all owners of property in the State who were against the Union would have their



property confiscated and—this was the important point—their slaves freed.

Frémont was highly satisfied with this proclamation, which he had no sort of right to issue, holding it to be more important than a successful battle. Lincoln was less pleased. The first he knew of it was its publication in the papers. He saw at once that shooting men in Missouri would do nothing but provoke justifiable reprisals, and further, that the regulation about slaves and confiscation, apart from the fact that it went against provisions already made by Congress, would alarm such Union supporters as there were in the Southern States, and would above all almost certainly lose Kentucky for the Union. He again behaved with extreme patience and represented all this to Frémont, urging him to modify his proclamation. Frémont was far too pleased with himself and his proclamation to do anything of the kind, and retorted that if there was to be modification the President must do it publicly. Which Lincoln did.

A storm immediately broke about his ears from the strong, and extremely vocal, abolitionists in the North—a storm which illustrates one of the difficulties with which from first to last Lincoln had to contend. His own camp was divided behind him, not indeed about the prosecution of the war but about the ends for which it was being fought. He was fighting to save the Union; others were fighting for the abolition of slavery. These others saw in Lincoln's modification nothing but weakness and disloyalty to their ideal. Their abuse of him was unmeasured. He let the abuse rattle about his ears and relieved Frémont of his command.

Next Lincoln had to handle a vital episode of foreign policy, the famous '*Trent* case'. A British ship, the *Trent*, was stopped by a Union warship, and two Confederate agents who were passengers aboard her were removed. The rights and wrongs of the case under international law were complicated,



though it is probable that the Union commander was going beyond his rights. But in any case British opinion blazed up, the London press used all available bellows to increase the conflagration, and the British Government presented a note which was in fact an ultimatum. Either the two agents were to be surrendered at once or there would be war. At this Northern opinion also blazed—very naturally, since the tone of the British press and of the official note were about equally intolerable for a nation with any self-respect to sit down under—and war was imminent.<sup>1</sup>

The Cabinet met and there were anxious consultations. It was clear that to stand against the strong feeling of the country was going to weaken even further the support for the Government, already weakened by nine months' inaction and lack of success, and also to some extent by the modification of the Frémont proclamation. But Lincoln saw the one essential point. It was the kind of situation which brought out the best in him. He kept his eye on his one single aim, and against all his own instincts—since he was the last man to take bullying with patience—he took the simple line that at whatever cost the Union could not fight two wars at once. It was all summed up in five words, as Lincoln put it: 'One war at a time.' The Confederate agents were released, pending arbitration, and the second war was averted. It is worth comment that for the second time on a major issue Blair was the one member of the Cabinet who shared Lincoln's singleness of vision and took his line from the beginning, though Seward, greatly to his credit, having at the outset let off a deal of bellicose hot air, then allowed his cool and able head to get control of his hot heart, and conducted the end of the business in a way fitting a wise Secretary of State.

<sup>1</sup> It is worth remembering that almost the last action of the Prince Consort was to make possible a peaceful settlement. The British note, as originally drafted, was so peremptory that no self-respecting nation could have swallowed it. He recast it in a form which made acceptance possible, though difficult.



Meantime, out in the west, things had been happening, and at least some fighting had been achieved. In the first week of February some newly built Union gunboats escorted transports, carrying 18,000 men, up the Tennessee River to attack Fort Henry. The troops were under the command of a brigadier, so far practically unknown, called Ulysses S. Grant. He captured Fort Henry, and then marched twelve miles across country to attack Fort Donelson. This was against all the rules of the text-books, since though his numbers had now been increased to 27,000, the fort was held by 18,000, and a superiority of more like 4 to 1 was supposed to be needed for an attack on a fort. After the attack began Grant was away for an hour or two for a conference with the commander of the gunboats. When he came back things were in a bad way and his right was on the point of breaking. He had the wits to have some Confederate prisoners searched and found that they were carrying three days' rations. He inferred that this attack was not just a counter-attack by a garrison standing a siege, but an attempt of the garrison to cut its way out. He gave orders that the right was at all costs to be held, and it was held. The commander of the fort then asked for terms of capitulation. Grant replied that no terms except immediate and unconditional surrender could be accepted. The Confederate commander surrendered, with 13,000 prisoners.

Grant was the hero—as it turned out the very temporary hero—of the hour. He had fought, instead of erecting 'gigantic works', and brought the Union some sort of a victory. There was very little in his previous history to suggest that he was going to be anything much more than an enterprising and hard-fighting brigadier. He was a West Pointer, with a quite undistinguished record, usually late on parade and ill-dressed. He was a magnificent rider, and used his skill in the Mexican War in bringing up ammunition at a crisis, riding his horse Comanche fashion with one leg over the saddle and the rest



of him along the horse on the side away from the enemy. He was no 'sportsman', and enjoyed killing animals as little as Lincoln. He rose to be captain, but he was, in those days, a hard drinker, and not always fit for parade. He gave his colonel a resignation, with the date left blank, to be sent to the War Department if his presence in the regiment became bad for the regiment. The resignation was sent in, and Grant retired from the army to become a farmer. He farmed with poor success, building himself a house which he called 'Hard-scrabble'—not a bad nickname for himself—and later moved into the town of Galena and made a bare living by selling hides to saddlers and harness-makers.

If ever there was a man who seemed to others, and who felt himself, a failure, it was Grant. He was a little man, only 5 foot 8 high, whiskered, ill-dressed, with quiet grey eyes and a grave, disappointed face, looking forward, in all probability, to a struggling life and an unknown grave at the end of it. At the beginning of the war he had the greatest difficulty in getting a command at all. By the end of the war he was in command of all the armies of the Union, had fought the Confederates to a standstill and accepted the total surrender of his far more brilliant opponent; after that he was twice President (though much less successful as President than as General), and his tomb is one of the public monuments of New York City.

Lincoln had had his eye on this quiet fighter since the previous September, when he had issued the following proclamation to the citizens of a town in Kentucky: 'I have come among you, not as an enemy, but as your friend and fellow-citizen, not to injure or annoy you, but to respect the rights, and defend and enforce the rights, of all loyal citizens. I have nothing to do with opinions. I shall deal only with armed rebellion and its aiders and abettors.' To Lincoln, suffering just then from the dictatorial follies of Frémont, this was refreshing,



and he comments that the officer concerned showed by the modesty and brevity of his proclamation that he understood the situation. A month or two later he brought off a small but decisive success when he was detailed by Frémont to make a demonstration with 3000 men against some 7000 encamped Confederates. He was not required to do more than skirmish with them and 'contain' them so that they could not be transferred as reinforcements elsewhere. He did more than he was ordered, and his reasons for doing it are so typical of himself and of his whole feeling about the war that they are worth giving. 'I saw that the officers and men were elated at the prospect of at last having the opportunity of doing what they had volunteered to do—fight the enemies of their country. I did not see now I could maintain discipline, or retain the confidence of my command, if we should return without an effort to do something.' He captured the enemy's camp, and then, when they rallied, cut his way out again, inflicting on them three times his own losses.

By the Fort Donelson exploit Grant earned his promotion to major-general, and his nickname of 'Unconditional Surrender' Grant. The North, thankful for the smallest mercies, made him a popular hero. This popularity he forfeited by his next engagement. On 6th April he was caught off his guard at Shiloh by a Confederate army of about equal strength, brilliantly led by A. S. Johnston. By the end of a day of desperate fighting he had lost one vital position, been driven back on to a river which blocked a retreat and hampered manœuvre, and was near to a first-rate disaster. But in the night he was reinforced, and after another day of bitter and confused fighting the Confederates were compelled to retreat. This entitled the North to claim the battle as a victory, but it was won at an extravagant price in lives. There was no doubt that Grant had been careless, and wild stories started in the press that he had been drunk, if not incapable. Lincoln was

urged to remove him. Lincoln's answer was brief. 'I can't spare this man—he fights.'

What kind of a balance-sheet had Lincoln to show for a year of war? Not one that was very pleasant reading for an impatient democracy. In the east there had been, at the start, a ridiculous but unimportant defeat. After that a great army had been raised and well trained, but it had not been in action, so that no one could judge whether it was a good fighting instrument. In foreign policy a war with England had barely been averted, and that only by a climb-down which was very hard for American pride to swallow. A scandal in the War Department had made necessary the appointment of a new Secretary of War.<sup>1</sup> Lincoln had appeared resolutely lukewarm on the abolition issue. In the west, indeed, there had been a few successes, which were better than nothing, but they were a long way away, and the ordinary public was not likely to realize that they were strategically much more important than their face-value suggested. The North was, to put it very mildly, disappointed; it had expected a short war and was beginning to realize that it must put up with a long one; it had sent thousands of men to the front and they had done little but occupy two undefended lines of works; the President whom they had elected seemed to have a talent for inaction and for surrender to foreign pressure. To some observers he seemed far from 'sound' on the slavery issue.

Lincoln himself, as he looked back at the year, cannot have felt very happy. But he had proved certain things about himself. He had succeeded in holding together a difficult cabinet. He was master in his own house, after the first Seward crisis. He had tested his capacity for standing abuse without losing his head or being blinded to his main purpose. He had acted

<sup>1</sup> Cameron was succeeded by Stanton, a difficult and tactless man, and a bad subordinate, but full of energy and a tireless worker.



promptly when prompt action was wanted, as with Frémont, and with undisturbed patience where he judged that patience was wanted, as with McClellan. He had managed to swallow a very bitter, but wholly necessary, pill over the *Trent*. Above all he was learning, and learning faster with each month that passed, how to do a job for which at the beginning he had no training. Also, and perhaps most important of all in the long run, though there is no sign that at the moment he realized it himself, he had, almost by accident, found his general.

# 9

## THE SECOND YEAR OF WAR: ANTIETAM AND EMANCIPATION

In April, 1862, Captain Farragut, of the Union navy, drove up the Mississippi and captured New Orleans, one of the most important of the Southern ports. This was part of the general scheme for the 'Western war', whereby the Union forces from the north and the south were to join hands and clear the Mississippi.

In the same month McClellan at last began to move, with the aim of capturing Richmond. Having occupied the deserted Confederate lines at Yorktown, he advanced to within twenty miles of Richmond. Lee showed himself at once the very great general that he was. He knew McClellan and his cautious methods, and so knew, almost for a certainty, that an immediate attack was unlikely. He also knew that Lincoln was nervous about the security of Washington. He was himself heavily outnumbered, but in spite of that he took the risk of detaching Jackson with 17,000 men, trusting to his own reading of his opponents that the risk was a legitimate one. Best of all, he did not hamper Jackson with detailed orders. He was, in effect, to go off into the blue with his 17,000 men and play old Harry with the Union nerves and its right flank.



The result was one of the most brilliant minor operations in the history of war, known as 'The Shenandoah Valley Campaign'. In fourteen days Jackson marched 170 miles, won several battles, captured much material, and so seriously threatened Washington—which he had no intention of capturing—that Lincoln withdrew McDowell's force, which McClellan badly needed (or, which amounted to the same thing, thought he needed), for the defence of the capital; he then proceeded to evade the attentions of 60,000 Federal troops under three generals who were ordered to capture this nuisance, and reported back to Lee in front of Richmond almost exactly a month after he had started. It was a risky move, and if Frémont, who always knew better than anyone else, had done what Lincoln told him to instead of flatly disobeying orders, it might have lost Lee his ablest subordinate and 17,000 men. But war is a matter of taking risks when the odds are reasonable—a lesson that McClellan never learned—and Lee's gamble triumphantly came off. He had by one means and another gained two and a half priceless months. First McClellan was held up from early April till early May by hurried earthworks and 16,000 troops. He was then held up for six weeks by Jackson's operations, which meant that troops on which he had relied were kept for the defence of the capital and not sent to him. He timed his final advance on Richmond for 25th June, and on the next day Lee, and not he, began the attack which led to what are known as 'The Seven Days'.

And now at last, when the fight was brought to him and he did not have to take the responsibility of going to look for a fight, McClellan showed something of his real powers as a general. We need not go into the details of the operations. Lee's strategy was brilliant, and only just did not come off; but it depended on extreme precision of timing, and was probably beyond the capacity of his inexperienced staff, operating in very difficult country. At any rate McClellan extricated himself with



admirable skill from two very awkward situations, and finally, on 1st July, stood in a position of his own choosing, at Malvern Hill, forcing Lee either to attack at a disadvantage or see all his previous efforts go for nothing. Lee attacked, was heavily defeated, and the next day retreated on Richmond. Rightly or wrongly, McClellan made no attempt to pursue. At this the feeling in the North rose to a pitch at which not even Lincoln could stand against it. Military critics differ about The Seven Days, and will continue to differ, some counting the result a victory for Lee who had saved Richmond and forced McClellan to retreat, others counting it a victory for McClellan who had saved his army and inflicted heavier loss than he had suffered. But the ordinary observer saw the plain facts, and I am not clear that he was wrong in his estimate of them: the Army of the Potomac was back where it started from, and Richmond which McClellan had billed to fall in February, was as firmly in the hands of the South as it had been a year earlier. McClellan was relieved of his command, and General Pope was put in his place.

In April Lincoln had written a letter for Seward to use as he thought best in convincing important men in the North that the Government really meant business. In it he outlined the general strategy of the war, and then said, 'I expect to maintain this conquest until successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or my term expires, or Congress or the country forsake me.' In July he showed his view of the length of the war and his determination by issuing a call for 300,000 fresh troops. The end of The Seven Days was an unfortunate moment at which to have to issue such a call, and uncertainty as to how the North would take it probably strengthened his determination to remove McClellan. Any change was better than none if it suggested that the new troops would be used in a new way.

Pope started off with a vainglorious flourish of trumpets, issuing a message to his troops which must have made them



grind their teeth. He had come from the west, he told them, where the habit had been to see only the backs of the enemy, where the policy had been attack and not defence. He imagined he had been brought east to pursue the same system. His views were sound enough, but he had better at the moment not have expressed them in quite those terms to McClellan's men, and not expressed them at all unless his abilities were equal to his pretensions. There have been, and are, generals at once able and conceited; but unless a man's ability is considerable, and likely to be equal to his opponent's, he is wiser to keep his conceit under his hat. And Pope, poor man, was on the point of taking on Lee and Jackson. He found them, unhappily for him, not only on the top of their form but also on the top of their luck, that sort of luck which has to be deserved, but cannot be counted on, when in a tricky scheme everything goes right and nothing wrong.

Lee let Pope make the first moves, and commit himself. He then devised and executed six days of the most brilliant movement and fighting that perhaps even he ever brought off. He sent Jackson off round Pope's right, via Manassas Junction. Jackson's troops, now well seasoned to the demands their general was apt to make of them, covered 50 miles in a day and a half, and got between Pope and Washington. Pope followed the lead and moved to Manassas. There, at the second battle of Bull Run, he was hammered by Lee. He retreated in disorder on Washington.

This moment was a real crisis of the war, and though the North was probably nearer to giving up the struggle a year and a half later, from sheer weariness, they were never again so near to purely military defeat. The Confederates were within sight of the capital, which was in far graver danger then than in the first few days of the war. But Lee was flying at higher game than a place of political value; he was aiming at a place of strategical value. Maryland lay comparatively open before



him, and beyond it was Harrisburg in Pennsylvania. If he could capture Harrisburg and hold it, he had severed a vital artery of the Union. It was largely a matter of time, and partly a matter of Maryland. Every mile he moved north he made his lines of communication longer and more vulnerable to a flank attack. If the Army of the Potomac would stay disorganized and dispirited, it would not deliver the attack; if Maryland would swing to the Confederacy, it would guard his flank, even if the attack came.

They were very black days in Washington, and indeed there was something near to panic. But during that summer, and The Seven Days, Lincoln seems, in some way or other, to have 'found himself'. He was always at his best when things were worst, and now, and from now onwards, he took on himself a new sureness. Earlier he had been ready to act against advice when he was certain that he must, but he had also, with a modest diffidence, been readier to yield to advice than he needed to be. From now on 'what he said, went'. He stood right out in front, and led.

His first move seemed an odd one, but it was determined by a knowledge of men. Without consulting anyone, he put McClellan back 'in command of the fortifications of Washington, and of all the troops for the defence of the capital'. When he met his cabinet he met also a storm of opposition, led by Stanton and Chase, and supported by all but Blair (again) and Seward. He admitted almost all that they had to say against McClellan, but he said that no one else had the confidence of officers and men, and therefore no one else was in any way fitted for the emergency.

Lincoln saw the essential point. Against time, and against the despondency created by their defeat at Second Bull Run, the Army of the Potomac had to be turned into a fighting army again, one with which Lee would have to reckon. If McClellan could do that, he could save the situation, and what



was done with him after that was a bridge that could be crossed when they came to it. If McClellan could not do it, nobody could, and if it could not be done, they might as well shut up shop. Lincoln's handling of his cabinet meeting has been recorded for us by one of those who opposed him, Welles, Secretary of the Navy, and one could hardly wish for a clearer portrait of the new Lincoln. 'In stating what he had done the President was deliberate, but firm and decisive. His language and manner were kind and affectionate, especially towards two of the members who were greatly disturbed' (presumably Stanton and Chase); 'but every person present felt that he was truly the chief, and everyone knew his decision, though mildly expressed, was as fixed and unalterable as if given out with the imperious command and determined will of Andrew Jackson.' Three days later, when Lee moved into Maryland, Lincoln extended McClellan's command to the control of 'the forces in the field'.

Events proved Lincoln right. For the moment, even if a brief moment, McClellan was a new man. For his first job he only needed to be the old McClellan, and by sheer personality he rescued the men, who still idolized him, from the chaotic despondency into which Pope and Second Bull Run had plunged them, and turned them again into a fighting army. And he did it with a speed which gave Lee only days when he had counted on weeks. Then emerged the new McClellan. With everything to gain, and nothing to lose, he threw his beloved textbooks overboard, left Washington undefended, stopped bothering about his own lines of retreat, and marched out with an army of 70,000 to threaten Lee's communications and, if allowed, cut the Confederate armies in two. No wonder that Jackson, who thought he knew McClellan, was puzzled. This new McClellan was a portent. But Lee saw the danger in time, adjusted himself to a McClellan who was for once behaving more like Lee himself, and turned for the



south just, but only just, in time to join with Jackson. Even as it was the Southern armies were cornered at Antietam Creek, where Lee had no room to manœuvre, and had to fight. McClellan fought him to a standstill, and he crossed the Potomac, heading south again. His great gamble had been tried and failed.

McClellan, no longer spurred by a desperate emergency, became his old self again. The Confederate commander, Longstreet, said that at the close of the day's fighting the Confederates were so badly crushed that 10,000 fresh troops could have taken Lee's army and everything it had. McClellan outnumbered Lee by more than two to one. But he did not follow. Success unmanned him and turned him from the soldier into the would-be statesman. When he ought to have been harrying the retreating Lee, he spent his time constructing a long letter to the President about the principles on which the war should be conducted. He told his wife that he had written 'a strong frank letter to the President. If he acts upon it the country will be saved.'

Lincoln had quite clear views of his own—which differed very little from McClellan's—about the principles on which the war should be conducted, and McClellan might have hastened the salvation of his country, about which he was rightly so much exercised, by about two years if he had got ahead with his proper job, that of pursuing Lee southwards, instead of wasting time writing a needless letter to the President which Lincoln read, put in his pocket, did not answer, and finally dismissed by saying to someone that it reminded him of a man who said when his horse started bucketing about and kicked the stirrup-iron, 'Well, if you're going to get on, I'm going to get off.'

The battle of Antietam marked a turning-point of the war for other reasons than its military importance. As far back as July Lincoln had drafted a proclamation announcing the



emancipation of rebel-owned slaves. He discussed this with the cabinet, and it was pointed out, strongly by Seward, that whatever the merits of the proclamation might be, that was a bad moment to issue it. The fortunes and spirits of the North were at a low ebb, and it might seem like a cry of distress. Lincoln saw the force of this, and held his hand. Now, five days after Antietam, he called a cabinet meeting.

This, a meeting of the highest officers of a great nation, was conducted in a fashion which only Lincoln could possibly have attempted. He did not start by telling them that he had called them together for their advice on a decision that would be of historic importance. He started by reading them a passage from an American comic writer, Artemus Ward, which had no possible bearing on the matter before them, and went on to tell them that he did not want their advice but was merely going to tell them what he was going to do. He had thought all along that the time might come to publish the Emancipation Proclamation which they had discussed before. 'I think the time has come now. I wish it was a better time. I wish that we were in a better condition. The action of the army against the rebels has not been quite what I should have best liked. But they have been driven out of Maryland, and Pennsylvania is no longer in danger of invasion.' Then he explained that he had been taking Maryland as a kind of test. He had promised himself, and, he rather diffidently said, his Maker, that if the rebels were driven out he would issue the proclamation. 'The rebel army is now driven out and I am going to fulfil that promise.'

Then he said: 'I have got you together to hear what I have written down. I do not wish your advice about the main matter; for that I have determined for myself. This I say without intending anything but respect for any one of you.' He asked then for any suggestions on minor points and matters of wording. Some suggestions were later made and readily



accepted. Lincoln ended with a few sentences very characteristic of him. 'I know very well that many others might, in this matter as in others, do better than I can; and if I was satisfied that the public confidence was more fully possessed by any one of them than by me, and knew of any constitutional way in which he could be put in my place, he should have it. I would gladly yield it to him. But though I believe that I have not so much of the confidence of the people as I had some time since, I do not know that, all things considered, any person has more; and, however this may be, there is no way in which I can have any other man put where I am. I am here. I must do the best I can, and bear the responsibility of taking the course which I feel I ought to take.' Very simple words, from a man rather sad ('not so much of the confidence of the people as I had'), and quite clear sighted without either pride or false modesty ('I do not know that any other person has more'), wholly without personal ambition, and ready to take the weight of any responsibility that was laid on him. They were the words of a great leader, and a lonely man.

Two days later the proclamation was published. It began by saying that the war would go on for the Union, and then that on 1st January, 1863, all the slaves in rebel territory 'shall be then, henceforward, and forever free'. This was a preliminary proclamation, to be followed by a final one on New Year's Day.

The reactions to the proclamation were very varied, and some of them violent. The South was of course more furious than ever. Many of Lincoln's opponents in the North were able to take the line that he had changed the war from one for the Union to one for abolition, and that he had acted as a dictator. But the out-and-out abolitionists were delighted, and the ground was cut from under the feet of sixteen governors of States, representing a large body of more moderate Northern opinion, what one might call Union-plus-abolition opinion,



who were at the moment meeting to draft a resolution aimed at forcing the President's hand on the abolition issue. In England the views of the chief papers were against Lincoln. *The Times* thought the proclamation 'a sad document, which the South would answer with a hiss of scorn', and *The Standard* called it a sham, 'the make-shift of a pettifogging lawyer'. And the language of several members of Parliament was wildly intemperate. But it was admitted that the proclamation made it harder for the Government to 'recognize' the South and so break the blockade, since any such recognition would appear to be a support of slavery.

On the whole the fact that the diversity of opinion was so well balanced showed that Lincoln's sense of timing had been just. And so far as the North was concerned the proclamation made it much easier for two groups of people, who had so far been running uneasily in double harness, to agree that they were at least, from whatever motives, pulling along the same road, and did not want to diverge whenever they came to a fork.

As to the view that with this proclamation Lincoln came to himself, that in his heart he had always been fighting for the slaves and not for the Union, and now declared himself, there is one thing to be said, a thing which if one is trying to understand Lincoln one cannot honestly forget, that his famous letter to Greeley is dated 22nd August of this year, that is a month *after* he first drafted his proclamation and submitted it to his cabinet, though a month before he issued it. The point is so important that I shall quote the three central sentences. 'My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the coloured



race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union.'

After this, Lincoln returned to the weary business of trying to get some action out of McClellan. After Antietam had been won—though not followed up—and the immediate crisis was over, McClellan, as we saw, relapsed into lethargy. 'He has the slows,' said Lincoln, and on 6th October, to try to cure his ailment, he gave specific orders that he was to cross the Potomac and give battle to the enemy or drive him south. McClellan replied by asking for supplies. A week later Lincoln urged McClellan at least to try to beat Lee, who was farther away, in getting to Richmond 'on the inside track'. McClellan retorted by asking for more horses, on the ground that his horses were fatigued. Lincoln, with one of his rare flashes of exasperation, wrote: 'Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigues anything?' And at the same time he proposed a test in his own mind. If McClellan allowed Lee to get between him and Richmond, that was the end of McClellan. Three weeks later than he had been ordered, McClellan crossed the Potomac. Lee threw Longstreet's troops across his road. McClellan was for the second time removed and yet another substitute was tried, this time Burnside. A month later, after a day of hard slogging, a series of magnificently gallant but quite futile frontal assaults, Burnside was bloodily smashed by Lee at Fredericksburg.

Now, in the middle of the war, Lincoln had to turn his attention to politics, and, amongst other things, deal with a crisis in his cabinet. It is not always easy to keep in mind that Lincoln was not just the champion of the Union, and above party politics. He was indeed President, but he was a *Republican* President, and the Democrats of the North were, on many grounds, bitterly opposed to him. We have had a parallel



before our eyes, Mr. Roosevelt, a Democratic President, with the Republican party hampering and discrediting him just as far as, sometimes farther than, seemed possible without hampering the war. There is something in the American temperament that hates political compromise, and a position like Mr. Churchill's during the war, as head of a Government of all parties, is to them a thing so distasteful as to be almost impossible. We know quite well that with us, when the emergency is past, the old party rivalries will come to life again, and make for healthy and vigorous political life in time of peace. On the other hand, in a time of grave crisis these rivalries only prevent a united effort, and the leader of the State should not be hampered by them. The Americans felt under Lincoln—as more recently under Roosevelt—that these rivalries must be kept alive whatever the crisis.

Further, elections to Congress (all the lower house and one-third of the upper) happen in the middle of any President's term of office, and show which way the political wind is blowing, so that a President who started with a majority of his own party in Congress may find himself half-way through his term with a hostile Congress. In the autumn elections of this year the Democrats very seriously reduced, though they did not quite wipe out, the Republican majority. This implied that Lincoln, as he had said himself, was not holding the confidence of the country.

Further, the more radical members of Lincoln's own party in Congress, anxious for more vigorous action, and stimulated by the office-seeking Chase, who was hoping for the Presidency in 1864, began to demand the departure of Seward from the cabinet. This, a direct attack on Seward, was also an indirect attack on Lincoln. Lincoln handled the situation very well. He called a meeting of the cabinet without Seward, who had offered his resignation, and of the discontented Republican members of Congress. Chase was in effect asked to make good



his charges against Seward. In the presence of the cabinet he found it hard to do so, but in the presence of his backers equally hard to withdraw. He hedged, and then, by way of regaining the confidence of his backers, he tried the dramatic gesture of resignation. Lincoln had what he wanted. In his own homely phrase, 'Now I can ride; I have got a pumpkin in each end of my bag.' He wrote a letter in precisely the same terms to both Seward and Chase, refusing to accept their resignations. Both agreed to go on, and the crisis was over.

During the last nine months of 1862 nothing of great importance had been happening in the west. The object of the Union troops was, when they could bring enough force to bear, to clear the Mississippi to the sea, so cutting the Confederacy's communications with the west and preventing either reinforcements or supplies coming through from Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas. Grant was at Memphis, and between him and New Orleans was the Confederate strong-point of Vicksburg. The place was heavily fortified, and the passage down the river almost impossible to force by boats. Towards the end of December Grant began to move against Vicksburg, and spent three months in unprofitable attempts to outflank the defending forces from the north. At this point, by the rules, he ought to have retired on his base at Memphis, got re-equipped and thought out a new move from scratch. On the contrary, he made up his mind that he would start from where he was, since having failed at his first attempt there was nothing to do but 'go forward to a decisive victory'. His plan was extremely risky. He was going to move his troops down the west bank of the river below Vicksburg, cross over, and outflank Vicksburg from the south and east. This meant that he cut himself off entirely from his base of supplies, would have to live on the country, and if he could not win a comparatively rapid victory would be hopelessly defeated. He took his risk and brought it off. He crossed below



Vicksburg on 30th April, and in eighteen days, after marching 200 miles and fighting five battles against forces superior to his own, he had got the enemy shut up inside the walls of Vicksburg and his own lines of supply re-established. It was a brilliant piece of work, in the manner of Lee. And if anyone ever tries to persuade you that there was only one Grant, the Grant of the later Wilderness campaign, of sheer hard fighting and the 'war of attrition', not minding what he lost if he could make the enemy, who could less afford it, lose as many, just murmur the word 'Vicksburg'.

Lincoln was beginning to take serious notice of this plain homespun general of his in the west. 'I don't know what to make of Grant,' he said, 'he is such a quiet little fellow. The only way I know he's around is by the way he makes things *git*!' Lincoln was used to generals who 'had the slows', or who played politics, or who issued bombastic messages, but who, whatever their differences, either did nothing or got hammered and most signally failed to make anything 'git'.

In January, 1863, Burnside was replaced by a general known as 'Fighting Joe Hooker'. He was a fighter and little else, with no capacity for handling a large force in the field. Having got Burnside's demoralized army into some sort of shape, he advanced on Richmond at the end of April, and Lee made rings round him at Chancellorsville<sup>1</sup> in a hard-fought and bloody battle which lasted three days. On 5th May he retreated again across the Rappahannock.

By the end of the second year of the war, then, the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued; Lincoln was very much

<sup>1</sup> Chancellorsville was a decisive Southern victory, but it cost the South what perhaps no victory was worth. Jackson was killed, and Lee thus lost 'his right arm'. He had other brilliant subordinates, who could do what they were told, but not one who understood him as Jackson did, so that he hardly needed to be told, and the two men worked as one. When we come to Gettysburg, it is worth recalling Lee's own comment: 'If I had had Jackson at Gettysburg I should have won the battle, and a complete victory there would have resulted in the establishment of Southern independence.'

master in his own house of the cabinet, but his backing in the country was even less certain than it had been; three new generals had been tried, with intervals of McClellan, and all had been equally unsuccessful; the only battle in the east which could possibly be described as a victory had not been followed up, The Seven Days was at best a draw, and the other main engagements had been decisive defeats. On the other hand, a very dangerous thrust of the South towards Harrisburg had been turned back, and in the west Grant had his grip firmly on Vicksburg. At the end of May, 1862, the situation was not noticeably better than it had been thirteen months before. By the end of July the tide had decisively turned.



# IO

## THE THIRD YEAR OF WAR: GETTYSBURG, VICKSBURG

The third year was a year of great events, but the events, though vital in importance, were few.

On 3rd June, Lee began his second great drive towards the North, aiming again for Harrisburg. He swept down the Shenandoah Valley, brushing aside the garrison at Winchester. On the 17th his advance guard was over the Potomac, on the 23rd it was at Chambersburg, and by the 27th the whole of his army was in Pennsylvania. He had left only one corps to contain Hooker on the Rappahannock, and Hooker was anxious for a stroke at Richmond. But Lincoln was no doubt right in telling him that Lee's army, and not Richmond, was his proper objective. Lee, indeed, when he was asked what would happen if the Union forces took Richmond while he was away, said, 'Well, then we should swap queens'; i.e. he would take Washington. Hooker, disappointed of what he wanted to do, paid no attention to Lincoln's instructions to follow Lee's flank, fight him if opportunity offered, and in any case 'fret him and fret him', and equally no attention to Lincoln's very just observation that if there was such a distance between the head and tail of Lee's army 'the animal must be

very slim somewhere', so that it ought to be possible to break its back. In fact the animal was so slim in some sections of the long line of march that in those sections it did not exist. However, Hooker did no more than follow Lee in a rather lackadaisical fashion, and on the 28th he resigned. He had been kept where he was only by strong pressure on Lincoln from the Chase party, who were violently anti-McClellan, and Lincoln was glad enough to get the resignation. He appointed Meade to succeed him. Meade was an unenterprising but quite competent general, who later did very good work under Grant. He had been a brigadier since August, 1861, and, with one very brief interval of recovery from a wound, he had been with the Army of the Potomac through all its battles. He therefore knew his troops and had had some experience of Lee.

He made after Lee, neither quite knowing where the other was, and the decisive battle of Gettysburg was begun almost by accident on ground which was the choice of neither commander. Some advanced Confederate troops raided Gettysburg, looking for new boots, and fell in with some advanced troops of Meade's. When Lee came on the scene he found a battle already in the making and had to decide whether to break off or carry it through. He decided to let the battle go on, in spite of a serious shortage of ammunition, which badly handicapped him through the three days of hard fighting. On 1st July he drove at Meade's right, with considerable success, and on the 2nd at his left, with some success which could not be clinched and made decisive. At noon on the 3rd Lee made his last throw. He ordered an assault in mass by 15,000 men under General Pickett full on the Union centre. This famous assault, known as 'Pickett's Charge', was somewhat like Napoleon's last effort at Waterloo, when he threw in the Old Guard in a last desperate attempt to break the British line. It was one of the most superbly courageous assaults in all war,



and it only just failed. The troops advanced in three lines across nearly a mile of open ground. The Union batteries held their fire till they were half across, and then opened with everything they had both from front and flank. The lines were torn to pieces, but reformed and went forward, right up to the crest of the ridge and the Union line. One Confederate general and a hundred men were actually through the line, and raised the flag of the South behind it; but there was no one to follow them, and the assault melted away. Meade made no counter-attack. Lee remained in position for a day and then retired on the Potomac. He found it flooded, and Meade was urged to press him hard while he was trapped. Meade delayed. Lincoln commented: 'They will be ready to fight a magnificent battle when there is no enemy there to fight.' On the 12th Meade, against instructions from Washington, called a council of war, which behaved in the proverbial way of councils of war. On the 13th the Potomac went down, and Lee got his troops over into safety.

It is always tempting in war, as in a game, to select one moment as the turning-point. I think that in the Civil War that was the moment on Cemetery Ridge when Pickett's charge, having stood losses heavier than almost any troops in the world could have endured, at last wavered and broke. Or, if one prefers to put it in terms of days rather than of moments, the turning-point was the 3rd and 4th July, 1863, for on the 4th Vicksburg surrendered to Grant.

Meade issued an order of the day to his army in which he spoke of 'driving from our soil every vestige of the presence of the invader'. When this was reported to Lincoln he said, in the deepest distress and dejection, 'Drive the *invaders* from our soil? My God! Is that all?' And later, 'Will our generals never get that idea out of their heads? The whole country is our soil.' But there Lincoln was expressing something against which all through he had to fight, since it was not only Meade

who felt that way, Many and many an ordinary man would volunteer for service in defence of his State, who refused to fight further when he was told to go outside his State. Lincoln, rightly, thought in terms of the Confederate armies which had to be destroyed wherever they could be fought, whether on Northern or Southern soil. Geographical boundaries were meaningless when not only was the whole country 'our soil' but the whole country was also the theatre of war.

Grant, very characteristically, did not even send the news of his own success to Washington, but left to the navy and Admiral Porter the honour of making the report. He had won the biggest Union success of the war, but to him it was just a job, well and truly done, and the thing to do was to get on with the next job as quickly as possible. But he had the thanks of the North, in the shape of a letter from Lincoln, which opened, 'My dear General: I do not remember that you and I ever met personally. I write this now as a grateful acknowledgement for the almost inestimable service you have done the country.' He then went on to say that, though he had made no comment ('from a general hope that you know better than I'), he had twice in the last six months thought that Grant was making a mistake. He left it to be inferred from the facts that the first time he (Lincoln) had been right. As to the second, 'I now wish to make the personal acknowledgement that you were right and I was wrong.' This letter was published in the press, and was preparing the way for more tangible rewards for Grant.

In the east nothing of note happened till the spring of 1863. Meade had to weaken his army by sending troops in considerable numbers to deal with riots in New York, and after some indecisive sparring, in which Lee tried to bring off a third Bull Run and Meade declined to be caught, and Meade tried an over-complicated manœuvre in the very difficult



'Wilderness' country, both armies went into winter quarters along the Rappahannock.

In the west Rosecrans, the Union commander, suffered a heavy defeat at Chickamauga, which would have been a rout if it had not been for a general who was just beginning to be heard of, G. H. Thomas, a Virginian, who held the left wing with 25,000 men, and through six hours of hard fighting broke the incessant Southern attacks. But Rosecrans then got himself needlessly trapped in Chattanooga, and was so clearly losing grip on the whole situation that Lincoln put Grant in command of all the armies of the west. Grant hurried to Chattanooga, on his way relieving Rosecrans of his command and telling Thomas to take his place. When he got to Chattanooga he had a conference with Thomas and his staff, and delighted them all, not only by his immediate grasp of the whole situation and his quick-fire of relevant questions, but by making it quite plain that in his view the only proper defence was attack. His first move, to open a new line of communications, by which 'Fighting Joe Hooker', now in the west, could come in with reinforcements and supplies, was beautifully designed and executed. But the battle which followed was not won by Grant or by any other general, but by the sheer indomitable fighting power of the Northern troops. The Confederates were holding a very strong position on the crest of 'Missionary Ridge', with several lines of defence at the top and rifle-pits at the bottom of the extremely steep ascent. The attack was led by Hooker, Sherman, and Thomas, and when Thomas's men had turned the Confederates out of the rifle-pits they were ordered to halt. But they were the men with their stand at Chickamauga in their memories. This time they were in the attack, and orders or no orders there was no halting for them. They stormed up the slope, overran the second and third lines of defence, carried the ridge and turned the Confederate guns on the retreating Confederates. They

had achieved what an observer described as 'one of the greatest miracles in military history', an assault against a brave and resolute enemy up a slope very steep and very rough, so steep and so rough that even they themselves, looking at it in cold blood, had to admit that they seemed to have achieved the impossible.

On 19th November a ceremony was to be held at Gettysburg for the dedication of a National Soldiers' Cemetery. The arrangements were in the hands of the government of the State of Pennsylvania. They arranged that the oration was to be delivered by Edward Everett, then the most distinguished of available orators. When the President, in response to an invitation, said that he would be present, it was clear that he must be asked to speak. But it is clear that his fitness for the task was looked on as very doubtful, and the communication from Governor Curtin, which was handed to Lincoln by a special messenger on 2nd November, is, particularly considering whom it was addressed to, and still more what the outcome of it was, one of the most genuinely and richly humorous documents in history. 'I am authorized by the Governors of the various States to invite you to be present and participate in these ceremonies, which will doubtless be very imposing and solemnly impressive. It is the desire that after the oration, you, as Chief Executive of the nation, formally set apart these grounds to their sacred use by a few appropriate remarks.'

Now observe: in the first place, this is a *State* function, to which the Chief Executive of the Nation can come, at any rate as such, only by express invitation; second, the ceremonies will 'doubtless be very imposing and solemnly impressive'—so don't for any sake indulge your taste for comic stories; third, the 'oration' is the main thing, and you will be an anti-climax, though as a matter of politeness we have to ask you to speak; fourth, 'a *few* appropriate remarks', i.e. for goodness'



sake be short. Lincoln did what he was told. He told no stories, funny or otherwise, and he was very short. He delivered one of the few very great speeches of which we have a record, and neither he nor his audience at the moment realized it.

Everett spoke for two hours. He made what was in its own way a noble speech, in the best style of florid American oratory. He knew the importance of the occasion, he gave his very best, and a good best. He was an impressive figure, old and handsome, and he held his audience of 20,000. As he ended they applauded enthusiastically; and almost no one remembers a single word he said. The tall, shambling figure of the President slowly unhinged itself. He spoke for three minutes, in his high-pitched voice which probably hardly carried beyond the first few thousand of his audience. The applause was a mere matter of politeness. His few words have gone home to the hearts of men more deeply perhaps than those of any orator, more deeply perhaps than those of any other man but one. Most orators address, and play on, the men and women immediately in front of them. Lincoln was talking over the heads of the audience at Gettysburg, talking, whether or not he knew it, to the world and to the future. What he said was this:

'Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

'Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

'But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedi-

cated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.’

It may seem impertinent to comment on that, but I think that something about it is often missed. People talk as though the greatness of that speech lay simply in its being a very plain and sincere statement of a great ideal. It is that; but it is something more; it is the speech of a finished orator, though in a very different style from Everett’s. It is beautifully and strongly shaped and jointed, and it is full of chimes and echoes and balances. Just notice what these are, and then read it again.

1. Through the whole thing rings the word ‘dedicated’.
2. Hear the repetition in the second paragraph of the ‘conceived and dedicated’ of the first.
3. Hear the repetition in the second paragraph of ‘lives’ and ‘live’, and in the third paragraph of ‘devotion’.
4. Hear the contrasted repetition in the third paragraph of the ‘dedicate’ and ‘consecrate’ of the first sentence, with the same words in the reverse order in the second and fourth sentences.
5. In the same third paragraph, third sentence, get the full force of the ‘say’ contrasted with the ‘did’, and right at the end the ‘dead’ and ‘died’ contrasted with the ‘new birth’.
6. One last point which has nothing to do with the language, but is so like Lincoln, with his kindly thought and sense of justice. It must have occurred to him as he wrote his speech that there were plenty of men still alive who had fought as hard at Gettysburg as those who had died there; so he puts in ‘the brave men, *living and dead*’.



'The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.' Those were the words of a man simply and sincerely modest; they were also, as we now know, quite untrue. Even today there are many people to whom Gettysburg is little more than a name, if it is even that; and in a hundred years' time there will be few, even in America, to whom it means more than the title of an episodic battle in a distant war. What anybody did there will be almost forgotten. But what Lincoln said there is likely to last as long as the language lasts in which he spoke.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of February, 1864, both Houses of Congress passed bills reviving the rank of Lieutenant-General, which so far only two men in American history had held. The actual appointment was to be made by Lincoln, with the advice and consent of the Senate. On 29th February Lincoln signed the bill, and appointed Grant. The Senate ratified the appointment.

Grant was summoned to Washington for a conference with Lincoln, and there was much curiosity in the capital to see him. There arrived 'an ordinary scrubby-looking man with a slightly seedy look', with a cigar, lit or unlit, perpetually in his mouth. When he went to a hotel to book a room the clerk thought he looked so insignificant, not to say poverty-stricken, that he gave him one of the cheapest rooms in the hotel. As the new arrival turned away to go upstairs the clerk was a little taken aback to read in the register, 'U.S. Grant and son, Galena, Illinois'.

Grant asked Lincoln what he wanted of him. Lincoln said he wanted him to take Richmond. Grant went out to the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac for a talk with Meade. Meade at once said to him that he realized that Grant might well want immediately under him someone, say

<sup>1</sup> It is pleasant to remember Everett's comment, in a note to Lincoln. 'I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes.'

Sherman, with whom he had already worked in the west, and that if so he would very cheerfully take any post which Grant chose to assign to him. Grant said that he had not the least idea of replacing Meade, and that anyway Sherman could not be spared.

Grant had come east with the intention of looking at the situation and then returning west to control operations from there. But he now made up his mind that he must control from the east. Part of the reason for his decision was, I think, that he had made up his mind at once that he could work in close harmony with Lincoln, and would not need a convenient thousand miles to save him from interference. He therefore telegraphed at once to Sherman, putting him in command of the armies of the west, and followed up his telegram in person for a final conference with Sherman, at which they roughed out the strategy which governed the whole of the rest of the war. It was simple enough. As Sherman put it, 'Grant was to go for Lee and I was to go for Joe Johnston.' Each was to keep up such continuous pressure on his opponent that neither Lee in Virginia nor Johnston in Georgia (or wherever Sherman might later drive him) could send help to the other. Grant came back to the east, and both he and Sherman got ready to put their strategy into effect with the beginning of the spring campaign.

The third year of the war saw the last great northward sally of the South held and repulsed at Gettysburg, though Lee got his battered army safely home again. Vicksburg surrendered, and this gave the North the practical control of the Mississippi, cutting off the South from three States on which it had relied heavily for supplies of food. As a result of Chattanooga a wedge had been driven into the South between the Mississippi and Virginia, and if this wedge could be hammered deeper home to the south and east the South was going to be



cut off from yet further sources of supply, and the land it held reduced to Virginia and the Carolinas. Finally, and not least important, after three years of trial and error, Lincoln had found the general who was going to win the war.

## II

### THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE WAR (a) THE WILDERNESS

In this last year of the war the straightforward military events were interlaced with politics. In this year politics meant not merely difficulties between politicians and soldiers, or cabinet difficulties and intrigues, not even important foreign politics, but domestic political events of great importance. And it was clear from the outset that military events would have a strong influence on the political events. When Grant opened his campaign the Presidential election was only six months away and the party conventions to nominate candidates only two months. The crucial questions were: would Lincoln be chosen by the Republican Convention, which was probable, and would he, if so chosen, be elected President for a second term, which was much more doubtful? And the fortunes of the armies in the field might easily determine the answer.

On 4th May Grant started out with some 120,000 men into the tangled and difficult country of the Wilderness. Three days later, after two days of savage fighting, he had lost 14,000 men (some estimates put the figure as high as 17,000), for no particular result except that Lee had lost not much less; and he could much less well afford them. Grant moved to his left,



hoping to outflank Lee's right. Lee was waiting for him at Spottsylvania, and there followed five days of fighting just as savage—sheer hard slogging, frontal attack followed by counter-attack. Grant lost 27,000 more men. He moved to his left again, to Cold Harbour, almost within sight of Richmond. Again Lee was ready for him, and again Grant attacked, and lost 7,000 more, this time without causing equal or even proportionate losses to the enemy. By 3rd June Grant had been in the field a month and had lost over 50,000 men. Later he explained what his determination had been. 'I determined to hammer continuously against the armed forces of the enemy and his resources, until by mere attrition, if in no other way, there should be nothing left to him but an equal submission with the loyal section of our common country to the constitution and laws of the land.' That was Grant speaking, but the voice was not to be distinguished from Lincoln's. No wonder that the President felt that at long last he had found in Grant not only a general who would fight to the end, but a man whose views about what that end was to be and what they were both fighting for were precisely the same as his own. And after Spottsylvania Grant wrote his famous, 'I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer'.

About this campaign and Grant's statement of his resolution there are two things to be said. It is often held that Grant was an uninspired though resolute general who could think of nothing better and less costly in lives than a war of attrition, the kind of war of which the principle can be crudely put like this: 'If I start with double the number of men that the enemy has and we can kill one man of his for every man that he kills of ours, there will come a time when he has no men and I have still half my army'. But that view, I think, overlooks one brief phrase of five words in Grant's statement. He said, 'by mere attrition, *if in no other way*'. He had used other ways in the west; he would have used them now and indeed he tried



them, but Lee was each time too quick for him, and forced him either to give up or to attack head on. But he knew that if he could do it no other way the man-for-man method must in the end succeed, so he steeled his heart and went on attacking. What he would not do was to give up fighting.

But the other thing that needs to be remembered is this. It was all very well for Grant to say that he proposed to fight it out on this line if it took all summer. The question was whether the North would allow him to fight it out on those terms. It was not the spirit of the army itself that was in doubt. There is nothing that makes one feel so clearly the temper of the soldiers of the North, in this last year of the war, as the fact that Grant's army, so far from being broken, or resentful of the hideous losses which he called on it to suffer, seemed in some mysterious way to catch something of the chilled steel temper of its leader. They felt somehow in their bones that at last they were under a man who understood war, who was determined on victory, and under whom victory was certain. And the South began to feel the same. There was to them something daunting about the cool relentlessness of Grant and his army and their readiness to take punishment. You see the same thing sometimes in the boxing-ring when two equally plucky fighters are giving and taking heavy punishment, but one comes up for each round as though he could stand ten more rounds of the same, and you suddenly realize that the other is beginning to wonder whether he can stand three more rounds. And you know that, barring a lucky knock-out, the second man is beaten.

It was not the spirit of the army that was in doubt, but the spirit of the North behind it. People looked back past Vicksburg to Shiloh to wonder whether Grant was any better than a kind of ruthless machine, and whether any victory in the world could be worth the sacrifice that he was demanding of them. The North was probably nearer to giving up and



accepting a drawn war after Cold Harbour, when victory was in fact almost in their hands, than at any other time in the four years.

Nine days after Cold Harbour Grant tried a quite different plan. He took his force south to make an attempt on Richmond through Petersburg. The move was very skilfully conducted, and Lee was not aware of it till the day after it had happened; but then, moving by the shorter route, he got to Petersburg before Grant could develop enough strength to carry the defences. Grant then attacked for four days, and lost 10,000 more men. After that he accepted the fact that all he could do for the present was to hold Lee pinned in front of Richmond, and the war in the east, with the exception of two powerful raids, one by Early which took the Confederates again to the outskirts of Washington, and one by Sheridan which devastated the Shenandoah Valley, so that the South could no longer use it as their 'corridor', became a 'war of position'.

Meantime throughout May Sherman was engaged in a series of manœuvres against the extremely skilful and elusive Johnston, and was very little nearer Atlanta than when he started.

Under these depressing conditions the Republican Convention was held early in June. For some time before it met various blocks of hostile opinion had been talking at the tops of their voices against Lincoln, some backing Frémont and some Grant; but when it came to the point the delegates from the various States showed an unexpected unanimity. They were not the newspaper editors and the political wire-pullers, but men sent to represent the public opinion of the Republican party in their States, the ordinary people. On the first ballot all but the delegates from Missouri, who had orders to vote for Grant, were for Lincoln, so that he had 484 votes to 22, and on a second ballot, which was not necessary but was taken to

allow Missouri to swing, the vote for Lincoln was unanimous.

The Presidential campaign was now on, though there was as yet no Democratic candidate, but during most of July attention was diverted from politics by a new outburst of active fighting in the east. General Jubal Early with 15,000 men swept up the old Shenandoah Valley road to Hagerstown and Frederick, and got some cavalry even into the outskirts of Baltimore. Then they swung east and south and threatened Washington. Washington was very thinly defended, and for twenty-four hours it was touch and go whether it would be captured. For the first and last time the President was under fire. He was standing with a group of officers watching the battle when they were noticed by the enemy's snipers, who welcomed a plain target. Lincoln was quite undisturbed, and apparently more interested in the battle than the bullets, but there were several casualties and one officer standing next to Lincoln was killed, and the rest insisted that Lincoln could not be allowed to risk himself any longer.

Before Early could press home his attack two divisions arrived from Grant, and Early retreated again to Richmond. This was on 13th July. On the 18th Lincoln called for 500,000 more volunteers, with the addition that any deficiency would have to be made up by a 'draft'—i.e. conscription—in September.

A series of intrigues against Lincoln now began, and during August they made so much headway that for a month or more Lincoln's chances of re-election seemed to be fading. The intriguers were a combination of the peace-at-any-price men with all the others who for this reason or that were against Lincoln, because he was too dictatorial in his methods, because he was not rigorous enough in his attitude towards the South, and so on. The whole story of the intrigue is too complicated to be shortly explained, and as it had in the end no effect on Lincoln's re-election we may let it go. But it is worth while



just noticing that at the end of August, even before anyone knew who the Democratic candidate was to be, Lincoln put his own chances very low. He wrote a few sentences and sealed them up. 'It seems exceedingly probable that this administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President-elect as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration, as he will have secured his election on such ground that he cannot possibly save it afterwards.'

On 29th August the Democratic Convention met, and adopted a 'peace platform'; it also unanimously nominated McClellan as the Democratic candidate. But as McClellan, though ready enough to be nominated, was also honest enough to say that though he would accept the platform in general he would not accept the particular 'peace plank' in it, there was considerable confusion in the Democratic camp. And between that date and the day of the election two things happened which made Lincoln's chances brighter again. On 2nd September Sherman at last captured Atlanta, and in October Sheridan conducted a raid through the Shenandoah Valley with the deliberate object of so devastating it that it could never again be used by any troops unless they brought supplies with them; which meant in effect that it could not be used by the Confederates. Grant's orders were clear. 'Carry off stock of all descriptions, and negroes, so as to prevent further planting. If the war is to last another year we want the Shenandoah Valley to remain a barren waste.' Sheridan did all that Grant asked, so that after his operations it was said 'a crow could travel through the Valley—if it brought its own rations', and he finished up by smashing Early at Cedar Creek, having by sheer personality and leadership restored what looked like a lost battle and turned it into a victory.

In the middle of October, three weeks or so before the election, Lincoln thought that he would just get home, his

estimate being 117 votes in the electoral college for himself and 114 for McClellan. And at this point it may, I think, be a good thing to try to give some sort of picture of the man for whom the nation was being asked to vote. In the first half of this book I tried to show something of the man against the background of the events of his life. But during the years of the war the events are so important that they refuse to stay in the background, and the man is liable to get lost in the President. One is continually having to say Lincoln, as President, did this or that or the other, because it is what was done that matters, without having much time to consider what Lincoln the man thought about it as he did it, and having no time at all to give any picture of the sort of figure that Lincoln, as he did it, cut in the eyes of the ordinary people of America, the people who were going to vote for or against him.



# I2

## THE CANDIDATE FOR RE-ELECTION

Lincoln was a familiar figure to his countrymen, probably more familiar than any President who had preceded him, and possibly more familiar than any President before or since, at any rate till the coming of wireless. I do not mean that any great number of his countrymen had actually set eyes on him, but the vast majority felt as though they had, felt that they knew what he looked like and the kind of man he was.

In the first place, his shambling, ungainly figure lent itself very readily to caricature, often unkindly but never unrecognizable. In the second place, he made it a principle to see, so far as the demands of his public duty would permit, everyone who wanted to see him, with petitions, protests, and so on. As a result there was an endless stream of callers passing through the White House, and each unit in this human stream went home to tell his friends what idea he had formed of the President, to add his report to what one might call the 'Lincoln legend'. Thirdly, Lincoln had certain marked peculiarities, of dress, of movement, and above all of story-telling, which helped the growth of a real picture of the man.

Much has been said of his story-telling. He had been famous for it all his life, and he made not the least attempt to lay aside

the habit of a lifetime when he became President. Many of the stories seem to me to fall rather flat in cold print, which is why I have given very few of them. They seem so badly to need the figure of Lincoln, with his hands clasped round his knees, and the expressive lined face above them, revelling in his talent for imitation, and ready to lead the laughter when the climax was reached. But I think that one or two general comments on Lincoln's story-telling are worth making. He loved a good story, and he found in the telling of it just as well as he could tell it—which was very well indeed—a rich enjoyment which often gave him a few moments' relaxation when he badly needed them. He once said something himself about this. An earnest Congressman, who thought that he himself had not, and the President certainly ought not to have, any time for trivialities, came to see him about McClellan. 'You have come to see me about McClellan?' said Lincoln. 'Yes, sir.' 'Well, that reminds me of a story.' The Congressman protested that he hadn't come to hear stories. And then, as he recorded, the President looked at him, and said 'with such a sad face', 'Ashley, I have great confidence in you, and great respect for you, and I know how sincere you are. But if I couldn't tell these stories, I would die. Now, you sit down.' And the story was told, and the business about McClellan then settled. The stories acted as a kind of safety-valve, or a sedative, like the incongruous reading of Artemus Ward before he presented the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet.

But a very great number of his stories were not told just for the sake of telling a good story, or of steadying himself, or of relaxing. They were told with a definite purpose: to drive home a point, to bring some bit of ordinary experience and the wisdom of common sense to bear on a problem, to make the man he was talking to see the real essence of the problem as clearly as Lincoln saw it. Many men think in words, and their thinking is apt to be somewhat aloof from reality, from the



lives of ordinary men and women as they have to live them; others think in pictures, and of these Lincoln was one. One man will say, 'It is not a sign of political wisdom to change the chief executive at a time of national crisis.' It is a perfectly sensible remark, but one has to think for a moment to see what it means in practice. Lincoln would say, 'It is poor business to swap horses when you're crossing a stream,' and there is the whole thing put so that no one, educated or uneducated, can help seeing it in a flash. He once said that he never invented an original story, but was only a 'retail dealer'; maybe, but he was the kind of retail dealer or general-store keeper that always has the right article on his shelves and can lay his hands on it. Here are one or two samples. Over the *Trent* case, when he was urging that between two risks they must take the lesser, he told the story of a man who was running away from a particularly hot corner in a battlefield where the air seemed thick with bullets. His officer drew his revolver and said he would shoot him if he did not turn and face the front. The man said, 'Shoot and be damned—what's one bullet to a whole hatful.'

Urging that foreign nations must be persuaded to keep their hands off, and let America settle her own domestic troubles, he told an experience of his own early days in Indiana, when he had gone to visit a farm-house which was run by a farmer's wife with a crowd of children whom she kept in order with a whip. She said, 'There's trouble here, and lots of it, but I kin manage my own affairs without the help of outsiders. This is jest a family row, but I'll teach these brats their places ef I have to lick the hide off every one of them. I don't do much talking, but I run this house, an' I don't want no one sneaking round trying to find out how I do it, either.'

Speaking of what someone else might have called the 'vicious circle' in the antagonism between North and South, he told the story of a man who was being chased by a bull



round a tree. The man gained and caught the bull by the tail. The bull got still madder. 'Darn you,' said the man, 'who commenced this fuss?'

The stories are not important in themselves, but the effect of them was of vital importance. When a man in high place can tell stories like that, and they get repeated, and others like them are invented for him, he becomes a figure whom ordinary men feel that they know, not a remote President in Washington, but a man like themselves who thinks as they do and talks as they do. There were countless men and women all over America, those decent, honest, hard-working, law-abiding citizens who are the backbone of any country, who felt like the old farmer after the Peoria speech, who wanted to hear 'jist a plain common fellow like the rest on us, that I kin foller and know where he's driving', and considered that 'Abe Linkern fills the bill'. It was just because so many of these people felt that they knew where Lincoln was driving that they were content to 'foller' and ensure by their votes that he should continue to fill the bill.

Much of Lincoln's time was spent in listening to petitions of various kinds, from the most trivial to matters of life and death. He would listen to any plea if he thought the petitioner was honest. But with pretentiousness or under-handedness he had no patience. He was a tender-hearted man, but he was a first-rate judge of men, and 'nobody's fool'. If a man, or a woman, tried to get round him with twenty letters of recommendation from people in high place but no honest case to plead, or someone tried to take him in by lies, down would come the great hands with a crash on the table, and the sensitive mouth set and the eyes steeled; there was a blunt 'No' and the petitioner went out a good deal smaller than when he came in, not quite certain what had hit him. But if an old woman came in from the country to plead that her husband might have a fortnight's furlough to go home and



see to his farm, or perhaps that he might be reprieved from sentence of death for some military offence, and she stumbled over her words, trying hard to put her case well, the great President, weary with all the burdens of office and the long agony of the war, would listen to her with inexhaustible patience and the most perfect courtesy; and if it was at all possible would grant her request.

Here is one instance, among many others, that shows the man, and his love of straight dealing. A Virginian girl was brought to Lincoln by a distinguished supporter of the Union, who warned her that she must be careful about her natural impulsiveness and not show that she was at heart a Confederate. Luckily she forgot the advice. She wanted a pass to visit her brother, who was a Confederate soldier and a prisoner. Lincoln looked at her and said, 'You are loyal?' She met his eyes, faltered a moment, and then said, 'Yes, loyal to the heart's core—to Virginia.' The President scribbled a line or two, folded the paper up and gave it to her. As they went out her introducer said to her that he had warned her and she had only herself to blame. She opened the paper and read, 'Pass Miss —; she is an honest girl and can be trusted'.

Many of the petitions were for reprieve from sentence of death by court-martial. Lincoln found it hard not to grant reprieves, and he must sometimes have been the despair of his generals, trying to maintain discipline, and aware that in an army, in order to maintain a standard which may in a crisis save the lives of many, the death sentence which falls upon a few is one of the sad necessities of war. But Lincoln was not a soldier; he saw the fighting-men as citizens who for the moment had to be soldiers, who, if they were spared in battle, would after the war go back to their wives and children and go on being citizens; it was not just that he was tender-hearted and disliked deaths, but even more that he hated waste, and so hated what seemed to him unnecessary deaths. One of the



famous remarks that was attributed to him was, speaking of a young soldier who had been condemned for sleeping on sentry-duty, 'I don't see that it will do him any good to be shot.' With certain types of offence he could be adamant, but for the most part, whenever he could find any sort of loophole, the reprieves were signed. One episode is typical of many. A Congressman one day found an old man crying in a corner of the waiting-room in the White House, wanting to get to the President and not quite knowing how to do it. The Congressman took him in, and he explained that his son in General Butler's army had been sentenced to death. The President read him a telegram from the General in which he protested against interference from Washington with court-martial sentences in the field. The old man thought this was the last word and collapsed. Then Lincoln, in un-Presidential language, said, 'By jings, Butler or no Butler, here goes,' and wrote an order that the man was not to be shot 'till further orders from me'. The old man said that this did not go very far, since the President might order him to be shot next week. 'Well, my old friend,' said Lincoln, 'I see you are not very well acquainted with me. If your son never looks on death till further orders come from me to shoot him, he will live to be a great deal older than Methusalah.' This was Lincoln's way with many of his reprieves. He did not reverse the decision of the court-martial, but merely postponed its execution, well aware that this in practice meant its annulment. But it was a method less prejudicial to discipline.

The most famous of the reprieves was that of a certain Private William Scott, of the 3rd Vermont Volunteers. It became a kind of legend, at some, though not extravagant, distance from the facts. At the end of a long day he had volunteered for sentry-duty in place of another man, and gone to sleep at his post. He was sentenced to death. His record was excellent and a strong appeal was made. Lincoln heard the



appeal in the morning, backed by a delegation from the man's unit, and in the evening remembered that in the pressure of the day's business he had done nothing about it. He ordered his carriage, drove hard to the camp, found the tent where Scott was under arrest, and told him that he was pardoned. He added that the only way that Scott could repay the debt was by being from then on the best soldier that he knew how to be. Six months later Scott was mortally wounded leading a desperately gallant charge. As he died he sent a message to Lincoln that if he had lived he would have paid his debt in full.

So ran the legend. The plain facts were much less dramatic. Scott had not volunteered for duty. A strong appeal had been made for him, as a result of which Lincoln did not override McClellan, but asked him if possible to remit the sentence. This McClellan readily did, citing not only the President's wish but also the previous good record of the condemned man. There was no furious driving through the night and no interview in the tent. Scott was killed later leading a gallant charge, but he sent no message to Lincoln, since he died without recovering consciousness.

But for a study of Lincoln it matters very little whether the details of the dramatized version were true. What matters is that Lincoln was the kind of man, and his country knew he was the kind of man, about whom all the details *might* have been true. If it had been necessary, he would have driven out at night to the camp, just as once he sent four telegrams by four different routes to make sure that one of them at least arrived. If he had gone to the camp, he would have spoken to Scott as he is supposed to have spoken. Above all, he would have drawn from Scott just that passionate personal loyalty which the legend represents. A story of that kind is one which cannot maintain itself unless it fits the man of whom it is told. It sums up bits and pieces of various other reprieves. And it is



one of those stories, part fiction part fact, which are in their essence truer than the precise truth.

There, then, are a few minute bits of the material which his fellow-countrymen had from which to form their picture of the man whom they had four years earlier elected to be President, and for whom they were going to be asked to vote again. They had a great deal of material. One of Lincoln's main reasons for being so willing to see everyone from the highest to the lowest was that he saw it as part of his duty as President, without performing which he could not be a good President of a democratic country, to keep in the closest possible touch with 'public opinion' in all sections of the country, or in simpler terms to find out by talking to them just how the minds of the ordinary people were moving.

He once made a comment on these interviews to a man from the War Department who protested that he wasted his time and his strength on them. 'I feel that though the tax on my time is heavy, no hours of my day are better employed than those which bring me again within the direct contact and atmosphere of the average of our whole people. Men moving only in an official circle are apt to become merely official—not to say arbitrary—in their ideas, to forget that they only hold power in an administrative capacity. Now this is all wrong. I go into these promiscuous receptions of all who claim to have business with me, twice each week, and every applicant for audience has to take his turn, as if waiting to be shaved in a barber shop. Many of the matters brought to my notice are utterly frivolous, but others are of more or less importance, and all serve to renew in me a clearer and more vivid image of that great popular assemblage out of which I sprang and to which at the end of two years I must return. . . . I call these receptions my "public opinion baths"—for I have little time to read the papers and gather public opinion in that way; and



though they may not be pleasant in all particulars, the effect as a whole is renovating and invigorating.'

But there are two sides to any conversation, and while Lincoln was learning a great deal about his people, a good many of them were learning something of him, and spreading what they had learned among their friends.

The picture they made was of a man in the best sense 'of the people'; a man utterly simple and utterly honest, who judged other men by their essential quality and not by their position; kindly to the individual whenever he could be, and sometimes perhaps where he ought not to have been, but ruthless as death on any deep question of principle and, above all, on the Union; not at all a 'clever' man, but a very wise one, with a talent and a taste for a vivid story: above all, a man whom you could follow, and go on following through disaster as well as success, not because he was a brilliant speaker, or because he was 'spectacular' or 'magnetic', but simply because you could *trust* him, and understand him, and know also that he understood you.

The Presidential election of the United States in 1864 was one of the most rigorous tests to which the democratic principle of Government has ever been submitted, and it emerged with credit.

# I3

## THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE WAR: (b) ATLANTA TO APPOMATTOX

When the day of the election came, there was no doubt about the answer of the people. Lincoln had a majority of nearly 200 in the electoral college instead of the 3 that he had forecast, and though it is true that, if three important States in which his majority was very small had gone the other way, his forecast would have been almost exact, none the less over the whole country he had a clear majority of 400,000 out of the 4,000,000 votes recorded.

And so Lincoln could go on with his job with fresh hope and fresh confidence, having received his orders from his countrymen to finish the war, and then re-unite the nation. He saw the first part of his task completed in five months; the second, to which in his mind the first was only the preliminary, he did not even begin. He was killed before he could even set his hand to it.

Sherman had captured Atlanta on 2nd September. On the 28th the Southern President assured his people that Sherman could not hold it, but would have to retire, and that his retreat would be as fatal as Napoleon's from Moscow. But Sherman



had very different ideas. He was going to play, on a far larger and in many ways more dangerous scale, the same move that Grant played before Vicksburg, cutting loose from his line of supplies and throwing himself on the country. He marched from Atlanta on 15th November, and the North lost sight of him for nearly a month. On 19th December he came to light again in front of Savannah and on the 22nd he was able to telegraph to Lincoln, 'I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the city of Savannah.' Behind him lay a belt of country sixty miles wide, driven through the heart of Georgia, laid waste with a ruthless completeness seldom seen in war. The troops pillaged for food and destroyed what they could not eat. The railway tracks were torn up rail by rail, the rails heated till they were soft and twisted round trees in what were known as 'Sherman's hairpins'. As the 'storehouse and granary of the South' Georgia almost ceased to exist. Opinions will always differ about this famous march of Sherman's, and I shall say very little, this way or that. As an operation of war it was courageous in design and superbly successful in execution. He got his army to the place where it could do most good, and in the process he destroyed a great part of the Southern supplies. But he could have done the first while doing the second only enough to feed his men. What he did was deliberate and licensed pillage. It shortened the war, but it left behind it a bitterness which after all these years is still alive, and of course immediately after the war was virulent.<sup>1</sup> I think that Grant, with his longer view, might have been content to get to Savannah and feed his troops as he went. But Sherman's view was quite clear. War was a brutal business and one that he had

<sup>1</sup>It is perhaps just worth mentioning, because it shows something that we, to whom our own Civil War is so distant, are apt to forget, namely, how vivid are still the memories and traditions of the Civil War in America, that as lately as forty years ago (and for all I know the same might be true today) a Southern girl at a Northern women's college would always get up and go out of the room if at a students' sing-song they sang 'Marching through Georgia'.



no love for; a little less or a little more brutality at the moment mattered less than getting it over and done with. If he could not only get to Savannah, but also go far in the process towards starving the South and breaking the spirit of even one State, he was going to do it.

The Northern stranglehold on the South was getting tighter, and on 2nd February there was a meeting between Lincoln and the Vice-President of the Confederacy to discuss terms of peace. But the conference in fact broke down before it started, since Stephens's view was that he was negotiating as representative of an independent power, whereas Lincoln's view was—and it could not be anything else—that he was the head of a nation, and of a government against which Stephens and those behind him were in rebellion. The upshot of which was that nothing but unconditional surrender was discussable. There was nothing for it but to increase the pressure of the stranglehold.

On 4th March Lincoln delivered his Second Inaugural. It was a very different occasion from that of the First, a very different man who delivered it, and a most remarkably different speech. In 1861 the war had not come and there was still a bare chance of averting it; now the war was nearly over and assured victory was in sight. Then Lincoln was untried and feeling his way; now he was beyond dispute, by the vote of the people, the great leader, clothed in full authority. It might have been expected that he would make some great political pronouncement. Far from it, The First Inaugural had been a very able, quiet, considered and temperate statement of policy. The Second was hardly political at all. It was rather a kind of thinking aloud, a meditation on the mysterious workings of God. And whereas the First Inaugural took about forty minutes to deliver, the Second took five. He began with a back glance to the circumstances in which the First Inaugural had been delivered, and pinned down the responsibility for the



war. 'Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.' Then he said a few words about slavery, and how it had been the immediate cause of the war. Then he said this: 'Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us not judge, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered—that of neither has been answered fully.

'The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him?

'Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid with another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said,

"The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether".'

And then he passed to his famous close, looking out beyond the war to the years that were to follow.

'With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work that we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.'

Early in February Sherman started north from Savannah. On the 19th of March he defeated Johnston at Bentonville, and on the 23rd he was in Goldsborough, where he joined forces with Thomas, who had been left to protect his rear when he started through Georgia, and who, after some anxious weeks, had in the meantime won one of the great victories of the war in December at Nashville, Tennessee. The Army of the West was now united again, and numbered 90,000. This northern march of Sherman's was a far more desperate business than the march south through Georgia, through worse country and worse weather, through country indeed which was supposed at that time of year to be impassable. But the army passed it, wasting South Carolina as it went, and though it was a tattered and weary army that got to Goldsborough, it got there.

The rest of the war can be very briefly summarized. Lee's only hope of prolonging the war was to get out of Petersburg, even at the cost of letting Richmond go, and unite with what was left of Johnston. They might then carry on for months more, and just possibly, even at this eleventh hour, tire the North out. Lee's movements showed all his old genius, but his men had no longer the supplies nor the food, nor perhaps quite the heart, to carry them through. He got away from



Petersburg and reached a place called Appomattox Court House, seventy miles to the west. Here he was headed off by Sheridan's cavalry, and found himself ringed in, so that he had no choice but either to fight one last desperate battle or surrender. He made up his mind. No doubt he would rather have fought and been killed fighting. But a battle could not save the cause for which for four years he had fought; it could only get more men killed. So he wrote a note to Grant, asking for an interview.

Grant named the meeting-place, a house at the edge of the village of Appomattox, and there, on the afternoon of Palm Sunday, 9th April. 1865, was staged one of the most moving and dramatic short scenes of history, the meeting of the two great leaders. They made an odd contrast. Lee was tall, and handsome, and point-device, in full-dress uniform with a jewel-studded presentation sword; he said: 'I have probably to be General Grant's prisoner, and I thought I must make my best appearance.' Grant was short and stooping, in his scrubby, dusty battle-dress, for which he apologized, explaining that he had come straight from the field and had had no time to change. Grant was embarrassed and started a conversation about the Mexican War, where they had met before. Lee had to bring him to the point by asking for his terms. They were as generous as was compatible with total surrender: officers and men were to be paroled not to fight again until properly exchanged; all arms, ammunition and supplies were to be given up, but officers were to retain their swords. Grant asked whether Lee had any suggestions. Lee said he would submit one. In the Southern armies the horses of cavalry and artillery were the property of the men themselves, and not of the Government. They would need them badly for the spring ploughing when they went home. Grant saw the point at once, that without them the men could hardly raise the crops to see them and their families through the next winter. He



said, not only readily but eagerly, that he would give orders at once that the men were to keep their horses. Lee thanked him, said 'this will do much towards conciliating our people', and signed the terms. The Union gunners were ready to fire a salute of triumph. Grant forbade it, and forbade also any cheering or demonstrations of exultation which, however natural, would wound the feelings of the surrendered army. 'The war is over; the rebels are our countrymen again.'

The war was indeed, for all practical purposes, over. It is true that Johnston did not surrender to Sherman till a fortnight later, when Sherman—ruthless in war, but like-minded with Lincoln and Grant when it came to peace—offered terms as generous as Grant's to Lee, and that the last Confederate army, away beyond the Mississippi, did not surrender till the end of May. But with the surrender of the Army of Virginia and its great commander the fight was over and the Union secure.

Next day there were wild scenes of rejoicing in Washington. A great crowd assembled before the White House and serenaded the President while he was at breakfast, the band playing 'The Star-spangled Banner'. Shortly afterwards Lincoln sent a note to Stanton. And I do not know that in all his life he did anything more characteristic of him. No doubt it was half a joke, but that was like him. Always in moments of great stress and excitement he had a way of coming down to something quite trivial, to get his emotions on an even keel. (You remember that before he read the Emancipation Proclamation to the cabinet he read them first a passage from Artemus Ward.) But also he was never too great a man to get for an unimportant person, if he could and thought it right, what the unimportant person wanted.

In this case his own boy, Tad, wanted to celebrate but had not got what he thought was the proper equipment to celebrate



with. So in the hour of his final triumph, when he knew that all he had struggled for through four years of agony was at last secured, the President of the United States sent the following note to his Secretary of War: 'Tad wants some flags. Can he be accommodated?'

Later in the morning another crowd assembled. Lincoln said that he did not feel able to make a speech. Later, he knew, there would be a demonstration at which he would have to speak. 'I will have nothing to say if you dribble it out of me now.' And then he got out of the difficulty in a way which was also very typical. He made a 'gesture' which seemed on the surface to be half humorous. But a good deal lay behind it, all his feelings for the South, and the need for Union. The earlier crowd had greeted him with the 'national anthem', but I think that we do well to remember what the tune was which the President himself chose, when he had the right of choice, to celebrate the end of the war. It should be explained that there was a song, a quite trivial song, nothing whatever to do with war, which was very near the hearts of the South, and which, even today, might be called the Southern national anthem; in many ways it was quite singularly like our own 'Tipperary' of the last war. This was 'Dixie'. Lincoln said, 'I see you have a band. I propose now closing up by requesting you to play a certain piece of music or a tune. I thought "Dixie" one of the best tunes I ever heard. I had heard that our adversaries over the way' (in other words, our neighbours across the street, with whom for the moment we had unhappily fallen out) 'had attempted to appropriate it. I insisted yesterday that we had fairly captured it. I presented the question to the Attorney-General and he gave his opinion that it is our lawful prize' (i.e. we have won, and I am not forgetting it). 'I ask the band to give us a good turn upon it.' So the celebrations, not so much for the defeat of the South but for the restoration of the Union, were celebrated in Washington, on the President's



own request, by the playing of the national anthem of the South.<sup>1</sup>

Later the same afternoon he explained why he found it hard to say much. He wanted time to consider, and not have to talk in the excitement of the moment. 'Everything I say, you know, goes into print. If I make a mistake it doesn't merely affect me, or you, but the country. I, therefore, ought at least to try not to make mistakes. If, then, a general demonstration be made tomorrow evening, and it is agreeable, I will endeavour to say something, and not make a mistake, without at least trying carefully to avoid it.'

His speech the next evening was a curious one. There was almost no jubilation. After a tribute to the fighting-men he turned straight to new problems that lay ahead, the problem of getting the seceded States back into the Union as working parts of it. It left the crowd a little disappointed and a little puzzled. The truth was that Lincoln could not, any more than Grant, sit back at leisure to enjoy a success. He was off already on his new task, and he knew that it was going to be a hard one. The sooner he started on it the more chance he had of doing it in the way he thought it should be done. So, having had a day

<sup>1</sup> I remember how sudden and electric was the realization of what 'Dixie' meant to the South, and, through that, of how much the South was still the South. I had the luck to be at the Democratic Convention of 1928, which was held at Houston, Texas, so that, apart from the actual delegates, who came of course from all States, the vast majority of the huge concourse of thousands of people were Southerners. During the opening proceedings 'The Star-spangled Banner' and 'America' ('My country, 'tis of thee . . .') were played. They were listened to with a kind of uninterested politeness; they were part of the necessary formalities, and people chatted in discreet undertones, like the audience in a theatre during the preliminary music. Then a girl came on to the platform and the band played the first chords of 'Dixie'. The result was astonishing, a sudden stiffening to a tense silence. And as the golden voice rang out in the solo, and the audience crashed in on the chorus, the outsider knew that this, and not the avowedly patriotic anthems that had come before, was what hit them where they lived and hit them hard. I make this apparently trivial point of a personal reminiscence because it is as well that people on this side of the water should realize that the South is still the South, with memories both bitter and splendidly proud behind it, and that it will take another hundred years to wipe out those memories.



to think out what he wanted to say, he spoke what was in his mind, not so much to the excited crowd in front of him but to the country.

The problems that lay ahead were very difficult, and Lincoln was probably the only man who could have solved them. There was bitterness in the South, and bitterness enough to meet it in the North, among those who not only had wished to crush the Southern States while they were rebels, but wished now to crush them for having been rebels. That way meant keeping the wounds open and rubbing salt in them. Lincoln through four years had spoken not one single bitter word against the South, had thought, so far as one can judge, not one bitter thought. The men of the South were his countrymen, and the soil of the South was the soil of America. His business was to bind up the wounds and leave as little scar as might be. With him he had Grant and Sherman, who felt as he did, and the army, which was as little vindictive as its leaders. If he, with his wisdom, his unhurrying resolution, and his capacity for handling men, could have guided the 'reconstruction', the disastrous first years of peace might have been, almost certainly would have been, prevented. But he was not allowed even to begin his task.

On the morning of 14th April. Lincoln held what was to be his last cabinet meeting. He laid before them some of his plans, and commented particularly on the happy accident that Congress was not going to meet again till December, so that he and the cabinet might have a chance of getting so far that Congress could hardly undo what they had done. He also said something which was long remembered, about punishment for the leaders of the rebellion. 'I hope there will be no persecution, no bloody work after the war is over. No one need expect me to take any part in hanging or killing those men, even the worst of them. Frighten them out of the country, open the gates, let down the bars, scare them off'—and he



threw up his arms with a 'Shoo!', as if scaring sheep or hens. 'Enough lives have been sacrificed.'

Everyone there was anxious for news from Sherman. Grant said there was none yet. Lincoln said that there would be soon, and that it would be good. The night before he had dreamed again the dream that he had had before nearly every great event of the war. He was on the sea, in 'a singular, indescribable vessel, moving with great rapidity towards an indefinite shore'.

In the evening of this same day the President and Mrs. Lincoln, with two guests, went to the theatre—against advice, since there was a good deal of fear that an attempt might at any time be made on his life, and also, it seems, against his own inclination, when it came to the point, though he ordinarily loved the theatre. But he knew that the audience was expecting him and he was determined to go. Perhaps he had the night trip through Baltimore, four years and more ago, still in his mind, and was not going to repeat anything like it.

At about ten o'clock a man called John Wilkes Booth, a fanatical Southerner, managed somehow to come to the President's box without being challenged, softly opened the door, and at close range shot Lincoln in the head, jumped from the box to the stage, escaped in the confusion, and rode away.

Lincoln was carried across the road to a small room in a lodging-house opposite, and members of the cabinet were summoned. Seward could not be there since he had been attacked the same night in his own house by a companion of Wilkes, but Stanton and Welles were there. Lincoln never recovered consciousness. His tough frame, the whipcord of the rail-splitter and tree-feller and wrestler of past days, was long in dying, and he lay all night, breathing heavily, while the doctors assiduously did the various nothings which were all that they could do. At half-past seven in the morning there came over the worn face, as his secretary recorded, 'a look of



unspeakable peace', and Stanton pronounced the famous, but very un-Lincolnian epitaph, 'Now he belongs to the ages.'

His body was taken with solemn ceremony to New York, where it lay in state, and then home to Springfield, where it was buried.

Between the log cabin in Kentucky and the poor room in the lodging-house in Washington lay fifty-six years of very hard and very eventful life. As a boy, helping his father in the backwoods, later in his untidy office as an unknown lawyer in a small Middle-Western town, lastly in the White House as one of the great figures of the world, he had walked humbly before God and served his fellows by doing the work that lay before him as well as he could do it. For the last four years, in that loneliness which great place always inflicts on any man who is worthy of it, he had steered through tempest, not at first, I think, very sure of his course, but growing surer and surer as the months passed. In the end he made harbour, and as the great ship slid up to her moorings, and his hands were taken from the wheel, and he was transferred to the indescribable vessel, moving with great rapidity towards an indefinite shore, he was ready enough to go. There were fresh burdens already waiting for him, which he would have shouldered without complaint; but he was tired, and he died in the hour of achievement, when the Union for which he had spent himself was once for all secure. I would like to leave him not with Stanton's words, true though they were, but with some words of an old friend who saw his body as it lay in state.

'The face was the same as in life. Death had not changed the kindly countenance in any line. There was upon it the same sad look that it had worn always, though not so intensely sad as it had been in life. The face had an expression of absolute content, of relief, at throwing off a burden such as few men have been called upon to bear—a burden which few men

could have borne. I had seen the same expression on his living face only a few times, when, after a great calamity, he had come to a great victory. It was the look of a worn man suddenly relieved.'

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